Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

DECEMBER, 1930

WEIRD TALES

Printed in U. S. A.

Vol. XVI, No. 6—25c

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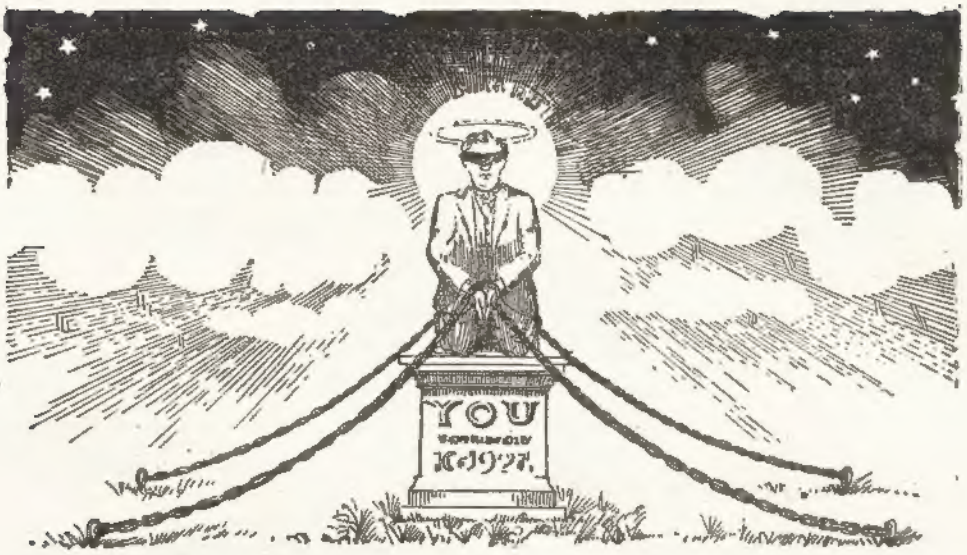

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVI NUMBER 6

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE EYRIE

"KEEP WEIRD TALES weird!" This is the advice that we are constantly receiving in letters from you, the readers of this magazine. To judge from the commendations that pour into the editorial offices, we are succeeding in doing this. This is by way of prelude to announcing one of the weirdest stories that has ever appeared in any publication: *The Horror from the Hills,* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. This is a three-part serial story that sounds cosmic depths of weirdness, a tale of a horror and menace utterly beyond human means to combat; a tale in which horror blows in chill gusts from the outer void. It is seldom that any story has aroused such vast enthusiasm in the editorial rooms of WEIRD TALES, and we want to let you know what a treat is in store for you. *The Horror from the Hills* is undoubtedly the finest work that this brilliant and imaginative writer has yet produced.

E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "The last two issues of WEIRD TALES were, in my opinion, the best that you have published since I began reading your magazine. Especially did I enjoy the way the tide finally turned against that typically small-brained and small-souled egotist, Herman Fuller, in *Another Dracula.* And how vividly and strikingly realistically did the author portray the activity of the mob spirit in the graveyard scene! It was a true-to-life sketch of such human cattle, too much present in any community, in Main Street towns in particular. In your August number I found a story that made tremendous appeal to my mind, namely, the reprint of Charles Dickens' *A Child's Dream of a Star.* It recalled to me my boyhood days, as I read it in my school books, but it was in Norwegian, the title being: 'Guttens Dröm om Stjernen.' How I wept as I read it as a ten-year-old 'kid'! Those school readers did not give the names of the authors of their pieces, and though I had many times wondered who wrote that touching story, it is first in WEIRD TALES that I learnt that no less a writer than Charles Dickens was the author. All in all, I am glad that we have a magazine that is 'different'—something that we do not get tired of reading, like those vapid, commonplace and too often downright silly love stories about ordinary middle class parvenues, and the various kinds of drivel which the majority of other magazines serve to a simple-minded public."

"Won't you please give us more stories so weird that they make one's hair stand on end?" requests Ruth Ann Austin, of Auburndale, Wisconsin, in a letter to the Eyrie. "I like *A Dying Man's Confession* in the October issue very much; also *The Silver Curse of Yarlik, The Druid's Shadow* and *The Grave at Goonhilly.*

(Continued on page 726)

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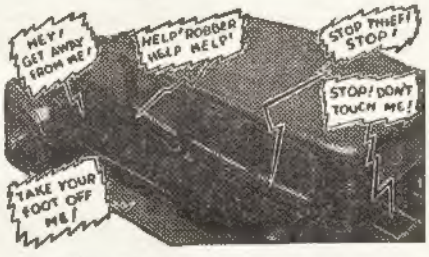

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(Continued from page 724)

Stories with scenes reflecting the glamor of moonlight on a Persian garden, the charm of romantic France, the exoticism of a Turkish harem, or tales with a Chinese, Arabian or South Sea locale would be greatly appreciated by us readers."

W. A. Betikofer, of Washington, D. C., writes to the Eyrie: "I have read WEIRD TALES without missing an issue since the 1926 number containing *The Bird of Space.* In these four years there have been approximately a half-dozen stories which completely overshadowed all others, with the possible exception of Seabury Quinn's stories of Jules de Grandin. I should enumerate them as follows: *The Monster-god of Mamurth* (Edmond Hamilton's finest), *The Lurking Fear, The Time-raider, The Call of Cthulhu* and *Skull-face.* Though I only know of *The Rats in the Walls* by reprint, it is fully worthy to stand in their company. Jules de Grandin is my favorite character, followed closely by Solomon Kane. *The Shadow Kingdom* and its sequels nearly edge into the list of incomparables. E. Hoffmann Price in his stories of the Orient creates perhaps the most fascinating and exotic atmosphere of any of your writers. Doctor Keller's delightful little stories of Cecil the Overlord add a finishing touch to your magazine that makes it truly unequaled. Writers such as Quinn, Price, Lovecraft, La Spina and a few others give your magazine the quality that makes it what it is. Doctor Keller is one of your best. Toksvig is fine, and Adolphe de Castro is acceptable but could be better. As for Hamilton — three cheers and a half-dozen boos! He has merited both in his time. To swing to the other end of the scale, I should like to see such stuff as the Mother Goose asininity of *The Land of Lur* eliminated. That was absolutely the *punkest* contribution to WEIRD TALES I have ever seen."

A letter from Robert Leonard Russell of Mt. Vernon, Illinois, says: "*The Portal to Power* begins perfectly and I hope the other three installments are on a par with the first. Try to get another Robert E. Howard story like *Skull-face.* His stories of Solomon Kane are very interesting. Jules de Grandin is just as perfect as he thinks he is (which is saying a lot). Tell Seabury Quinn that if he ever writes any other type of story the readers will come en masse and lynch him."

Writes James Gartlan of Toronto, Canada: "I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES since July, 1926. WEIRD TALES has given me some very interesting evenings and also some when I was afraid to move lest the creature of Seabury Quinn or H. P. Lovecraft would come out of the shadows of my den. I get a bigger kick out of Jules de Grandin's French slang and his method of combating the occult demons than I get from any detective or Western novel. Jules is a great cheery fellow always ready to help any one who is in the clutches of the occult. Just one kick—*Earthworms of Karma* started out great, as did *The Black Monarch,* but the author seemed to be in too great hurry to finish. I am eagerly awaiting ORIENTAL STORIES and hope that it will be a worthy sister magazine to WEIRD TALES."

"Speaking as a reader," writes Clark Ashton Smith, author of *The End of the Story,* "I should like to say that WEIRD TALES is the one magazine that gives its writers ample imaginative leeway. Next to it come the three or four magazines in which fancy can take flight under the egis of science; and after these, one is lost in a Bœotian desert. All the others, without exception, from the long-established re-

(Continued on page 852)

Classics of Weird Literature

Autographed by the Author

The Wind That Tramps the World

Splashes of Chinese Color

By Frank Owen

The Purple Sea

ACCLAIMED BY CRITICS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

New York Times: "Fanciful, touched by the supernatural, exotic in thought and coloring. Flowers, poems, music and jade are interwoven with their themes and the effect is often both quaint and charming."

The China Weekly Review, Shanghai, China: "Reveals a true sense of gentleness, the heart of a dreamer, a deep sense of rhythm and beauty. He sees China and the Chinese through misty, naive, sometimes philosophic eyes."

Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Honolulu, Hawaii: "They are strange and glowing tales of an unearthly beauty. Their scenes are laid in China but they might be anywhere. They are essentially a part of the history of those lost lands where Dunsany's heroes live and die magnificently and where Walter de la Mare's dark travelers knock vainly at mysterious moonlit doors."

Ohio State Journal, Columbus, Ohio: "There is some weirdness here, some mystery and some tender passages, enough of each to make a superlative ensemble that won for this author a secure place in the field of Far East fiction."

Daily Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, S. D.: "This is a collection to be read, laid down and read again."

Wilmington Every Evening, Wilmington, Del.: "Deserves a place among one's favorite books."

Radio Station KDKA, Pittsburgh: "For those who are interested in Chinese literature and traditions, we believe this book will find a cordial welcome. A very beautiful book."

The Globe, Toronto, Ont.: "Dealing with curious phases of Chinese life, they are imaginative, colorful and replete with poetry. For the first of these qualities they might be likened to some of the creations of Edgar Allan Poe, but even the weirdest of them possess a tenderness to which Poe was a stranger."

Arizona Republican, Phoenix, Ariz.: "It is not often that such a book, as deserving of praise and as full of real literary merit as "The Wind That Tramps the World," comes our way. This sounds like effusiveness, but it isn't. It's merely giving credit for a real literary achievement. . . . They are masterpieces of a rich imagination, deep and gripping in their beauty and romance."

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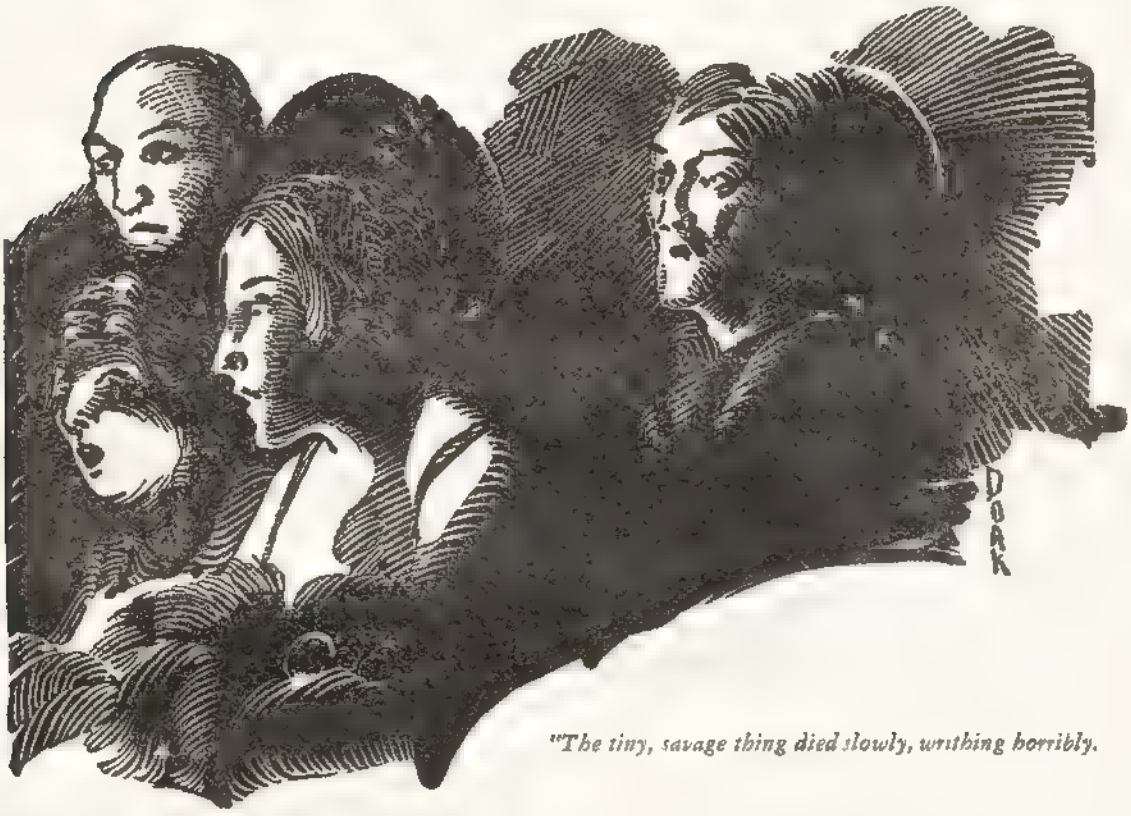
The Wolf of

by Seabury Quinn

THE house party with which Norval Fleetwood was celebrating the completion of Twelvetrees, his new country seat, was drawing to an inauspicious close. Friday and Saturday had been successful, and more than one luckless bunny had found his way into the game-bags and thence to the pot-pie, but with Sunday morning came a letdown which set the guests longing for the city, the theater, the night clubs and the crowded, comfortable associations of the workaday world. Rain, lashed and driven by a northwest wind, opened the day, by midafternoon autumn gave up the fight and winter took possession of the world like a rowdy barbarian sacking a captured city. The late-November gale raced round the house, wrenching at doors and shutters, howling bawdy songs down chimneys and wrestling savagely with the twelve great oaks in the front lot from which the house took its name. The guests were wearied of each other as shipwrecked mariners might tire of their companions' faces, and to make matters more unbearable the line which fed electric current to the house went dead beneath the buffetings of the wind-storm and the radio ceased blaring forth its

St. Bonnot



"The tiny, savage thing died slowly, writhing horribly.

dancing jazz at the same instant every light in the house winked out and the motors of the big refrigerator in the pantry stopped humming.

Little spurts of flame here and there proclaimed lighted matches, a few candles were requisitioned and set alight, their feeble, trembling flames doing little more than stain the pitch-black darkness with an indeterminate dusk, and host and guests settled down in gloomy contemplation of events to wait the opportunity of a reasonable excuse to say good-night and escape from each others' company.

"No one here can play dance music," grumbled one.

"No piano here to play, even if we had a musician," Fleetwood answered gloomily. "Dodson's are infernally slow getting the furniture out, it seems to me."

"Too dark to play bridge; can't see whether you're holdin' spades or diamonds."

"I shouldn't play if it weren't. Lost too much last night—lot more than I could afford."

"Grand service the electric company gives, I don't think. If I had my way——"

"Oh, *I* know what let's do!" Mazie Noyer, plump, forty and unbecomingly flirtatious, suddenly cried in the high, thin voice which seems the exclusive property of short, fat women. "Let's have a séance! This is just the night for it; cold and dark and spooky. Come on,

everybody; I'll be the medium; I can make a dining-table take a joke any time!"

"But certainly," Jules de Grandin whispered in my ear. "Does she not do so three times each day, to say nothing of the enormous sandwiches she consumes between meals? Do not join them, Friend Trowbridge; he who puts his hands upon the table to summon spirits risks more than burned fingers. Yes. Let them have their foolishness by themselves."

Accordingly, while Fleetwood, his young wife and seven of their guests trailed into the dining-hall in the wake of Mazie's provocatively swishing skirts, de Grandin and I remained on the leather-upholstered settle before the blazing logs in the hall fireplace where we could watch the dim shapes circled round the table, yet be ourselves unobserved.

The ring was quickly formed. Each member of the party placed his hands flat upon the table's polished oak, his own thumbs touching, his extended little fingers in light contact with those of his neighbors to left and right.

"I think we ought to sing," suggested Mazie. "Madame Northrop always begins her séances with a hymn. What shall it be?" For a moment there was silence; then, in a high falsetto she began:

"Behold the innumerable host
Of angels clothed in light,
Behold the spirits of the just
Whose faith is changed to sight."

She concluded the verse with a dropping, pleading tremolo, then spoke in a still, awe-struck voice, as though she half believed her own mummery:

"Spirits of the departed, you from before whose eyes the separating veil has been lifted, we are assembled tonight to commune with you, if any of you be here present." A short pause, then: "Are there any spirits with us? If so, signify your presence by rapping once upon the table."

Another pause, in which the crackling of a burning knot and the hissing of an imperfectly seasoned log sounded almost thunderously, followed her invitation.

Jules de Grandin snapped the flint of his pocket lighter and set a vile-smelling French cigarette aglow, then glanced impatiently through the archway leading to the room beyond. *"Insensée,"* he whispered contemptuously. "Had she but the sense with which the good God endowed the most half-witted of silly geese, she would know that her greatest success tonight would be a total failure to evoke——"

"Oh, how *nice!*" Mazie's high-pitched exclamation cut through his muttered observation. "Is it fine or superfine—I mean man or woman? Rap once for a man, twice for a woman, please."

The little Frenchman's sleek, blond head shot forward, his ear turned toward the doorway. All pretense of boredom was gone and every line of his small, sensitive face registered alert attention as it showed in sharp silhouette against the bright background of the firelight.

Through the dim, candle-lit dusk we caught the echo of a single sharp, incisive knock.

"A man!" Miss Noyer's voice came in an awed whisper. "Who are—I mean who were you? Where and when did you live? Strike once for A, twice for B, three times for C, and so on."

Another pause, then a slow, distinct rapping, as though the table had been struck sharply with a bent knuckle. Seven strokes, followed by nine, then twelve, another twelve, then five, continuing until *"Gilles Garnier—St. Bonnot—in the reign of King Charles,"* had been laboriously spelled on the resounding wood.

"Dieu de Dieu, 'Gilles Garnier of St. Bonnot,' it says!" de Grandin exclaimed

in a sharp, rasping whisper. "This is no longer merely a matter to amuse fools, Friend Trowbridge; we must intervene, right away, immediately, at once. Come."

He rose abruptly from the couch and took a step toward the dining-room, but paused in mid-stride, his head thrown back like a hunting dog sniffing the breeze for quarry. Almost, it seemed to me, the needle-sharp ends of his little, tightly waxed mustache quivered with excitement like the whiskers of an irritable and super-alert tom-cat. I, too, felt a sudden chill of nervous excitement —almost terror—run through me, for even as de Grandin paused, there came from far away, seemingly from the gloomy, wooded hill, which lay a mile or more across the cleared pasture-land, a faint but steadily growing sound. So low it could scarcely be dissociated from the dismal skirling of the wind it was at first, but steadily it mounted and swelled in tone and volume, a long-drawn, ululant howl, rising to a shrill crescendo, sinking to a moan, then rising once again in quavering, hopeless cry, poignant as the wailing of a lost soul seeking sanctuary from pursuing furies. And as the distant belling bay died once again amid the whistling chorus of the wind, there came an answering call *from the darkened dining-room.* It started with a choking, rasping moan, as though one of the sitters at the table had strangled and gasped for breath; then, as though torn from tortured flesh by torment too great to be resisted, it rose in answer to the distant howl: *"Ow-o-o-o-O-O-O!"* swelling with ever-increasing stress, then repeated once again with hopeless, mourning diminuendo: *"OW-O-O-O-o-o-oo!"*

Strangely, too, the half-reluctant, half-exultant cry was so quickly voiced that it was impossible to place its origin, save to say it emanated from the dining-room.

"Nom d'un chat noir, who makes this business of the monkey?" de Grandin challenged sharply. "I will not have it!" He burst into the dining-room, eyes ablaze, face working with unbridled fury. "Fools, *bêtes, dupes,* you know not what you do! To mock at them is to invite destruction of——"

He paused, fairly choking with savage anger, and as if to punctuate his tirade the electric current came on again, flooding the big house with sudden brilliance, limning the scene in the dining-hall like a *tableau vivant* on the stage. Fleetwood and eight others sat with hands still pressed upon the table, startled, rather foolish expressions on their faces as they blinked owlishly in the sudden deluge of light. Hildegarde, his six-months' bride for whom the house at Twelvetrees had been built, lay cheek-down upon the table, her heavy, dark-bronze hair unbound and cascading across the polished Flemish oak, her face pale as carven ivory, her lush red lips slightly parted, displaying twin lines of little milk-white teeth between them.

"Good Lord!" our host exclaimed, "she's fainted! That fool joke was too much for her." He glared angrily around the circle of startled faces. "Who let out that God-awful howl?" he demanded fiercely.

The little Frenchman cast an appraising look at the unconscious girl and a quick, venomous glance at Mazie Noyer. "See to her, Friend Trowbridge, if you please," he ordered curtly with a nod toward Hildegarde. *"Mademoiselle,* this is your work; I trust you are duly proud of it," he added coldly, glaring at Mazie again.

"I?" Miss Noyer returned in a scandalized voice. "Why, I never even *dreamed* of doing such a thing! I was as surprized as any one when that inhuman howl started—*ugh,* right in this room, too!" She shook her well-upholstered

shoulders in a gesture of repugnance, then favored de Grandin with a withering look. "I think you forget yourself, Doctor de Grandin," she reminded. "You owe me an apolo——"

"*Mille pardons, Mademoiselle,*" he cut in acidly, "whatever my debt may be, this is no time for repayment. Me, I think an evening of *ennui* would have been preferable to your so stupid invocation of forces of which you know nothing. However, we can but pray that no great harm is done."

He turned his shoulder squarely on her and bowed to the company with frigid courtesy. "*Messieurs, Mesdames,*" he announced, "it grows late and we all have business in the city tomorrow. I suggest we seek our beds while this so temperamental light still holds." He turned on his heel and left the room without a single backward look at Mazie Noyer or any offer of apology for his hasty accusation.

"AM BRINGING Hildegarde to town for consultation. Please see me tomorrow.

"FLEETWOOD."

I passed the telegram to Jules de Grandin and grinned in spite of myself at the sober expression on his face as he perused the terse message. "Why so serious?" I asked, helping myself to a fresh serving of griddle cakes and honey. "That sort of thing has been going on ever since Adam and Eve left the Garden to set up housekeeping. Norval and Hildegarde are excited, of course, but it's only a biological function, and——"

"*Ah bah!*" he cut in. "You annoy me, you vex me, you harass me, my friend. You say it is the coming of a happy event which brings Monsieur and Madame Fleetwood to town. I hope you are correct, but I fear you are in error. Would he telegraph if that were all? Must he see you right away, at once, immediately about a matter which can not, in the course of nature, be either hurried or delayed? I doubt it. Indeed, I greatly doubt that it has anything to do with this"—he tapped the telegram with his breakfast fork—"but concerns something much more sinister. Yes, I have worried much concerning Madame Hildegarde since that accursed night when the senseless Mademoiselle Noyer played her monkey tricks in that darkened house. And——"

"You're absurd," I told him.

"I hope so," he admitted seriously. "We shall eventually see who laughs in whose face, my friend."

In deference to Fleetwood's message I stayed indoors most of the following day, but dinner-time came and went without further word from him. "Confound it," I grumbled, glancing irritably at my watch, "I wish they'd come, if they're coming. *King Lear's* playing at the Academy tonight, and I'd like to see it. If they'll only hurry I'll have time to get there before the middle of the first act, and——"

"*Eh bien,* be patient, my old one," de Grandin counseled. "Unless I am more mistaken than I think, you shall soon see a tragedy the like of which Monsieur Shakespeare never dreamed. Indeed, I think the curtain is already rising——" He turned toward the consulting-room door expectantly, and as though evoked by his words Norval Fleetwood entered.

"Hildegarde's up at the Passaic Boulevard house," he answered my query as we shook hands. "It's such a wretched night, I thought I'd better leave her home, and——" He paused, as though the words somehow stuck in his throat; then: "And I thought I'd better see you before you see her, sir."

"*Ah?*" de Grandin's barely whispered comment had a ring of triumph in it, and I favored him with a black look.

Fleetwood nodded shortly, almost as if in answer to the Frenchman. "I'm almost

wild with anxiety about her, Doctor," he told me. "You remember that fool séance Mazie Noyer got up that Sunday night two weeks ago when the lights went out at Twelvetrees? It started right after that."

"A-ah?" de Grandin murmured.

"What seems to be the trouble?" I asked, casting another withering glance toward the little Frenchman.

"I—I only wish I knew, sir. Hildegarde was restless as a child with fever all that night, and dull and listless as a convalescent next day. I had to come to town and was delayed considerably getting back that night, and dinner should have been over an hour when I returned, but she hadn't eaten and said she had no appetite. That was strange for her, she's always been so well and healthy, you know. But"—he looked at me with the serio-comic expression every man uses in such circumstances—"well, you know how they are, sir."

This time it was my turn to register triumph, but I forbore to glance at de Grandin, waiting Fleetwood's next remark.

"It must have been something after eleven," he continued, "when out across the cleared land I heard the deep, long-drawn baying of a hound. Some one in the neighborhood must have a pack of the brutes and let 'em run at night, for I'd heard 'em once or twice earlier in the evening, but not so near or loud as this time. Doctor Trowbridge——"

He paused again, swallowed once or twice convulsively, and drummed nervously on the edge of the desk with his finger-tips, averting his gaze like a shame-faced schoolboy about to make a confession.

"Yes?" I prompted as the silence lengthened embarrassingly.

"You remember that horrible, inhuman howl some one let out in my dining-room that Sunday night? Doctor de Grandin accused Mazie Noyer of it."

I nodded.

"It wasn't Mazie. It was Hildegarde."

"Nonsense," I objected sharply. "Hildegarde had fainted; it couldn't have been——"

"Yes, it was, sir. I know it, because the next night, when that devilish baying sounded under our window, she began to roll and toss restlessly in bed, as though suffering a nightmare; then"—he stopped again, then hurried on as though anxious to get the statement finished—"then she threw back the bed-clothes, rose to her knees *and answered it!"*

"A-a-ah?" Jules de Grandin placed his fingers tip to tip, crossed his knees and regarded the toe of his patent leather evening shoe as though it were a novel sight. "And then, *Monsieur,* if you please, what next?"

Fleetwood's voice trembled, almost as if with ungovernable anger. "That was only the beginning!" he shot back. "I shook her, and she seemed to wake, but for more than an hour she lay there as if on the borderline of consciousness, fingering the bedclothes, rolling her head on the pillow, and moaning piteously every once in a while. It must have been almost morning before she finally went to sleep. Once or twice while she lay in that odd semi-conscious state, that infernal howling sounded underneath the window, and each time she shook and trembled as if——"

"Of course. It frightened her," I interrupted soothingly.

"No! It wasn't like that. It was as if she were all eagerness to get out there with that devilish hound—fairly trembling to go, sir!"

I stared at him incredulously, but his next words left me fairly breathless:

"Next night she went!"

"What?" I almost shouted.

"Just that, sir. The howling started during dinner next evening, and Hildegarde dropped her knife and fork and almost went into hysterics. I went to the den and got out a gun to give the beast a dose of bird-shot, but when I opened the door there was nothing to be seen. I wandered round the house several times, and once I thought I saw it over by the wood lot—a big, white, shaggy brute—but it was so far out of range I didn't even try a shot.

"I woke up a little after midnight with a queer feeling something was wrong, and when I looked at Hildegarde's bed she wasn't there. I waited nearly half an hour, then went to look for her. While I was going through the library I heard that dam' dog howling again, and when I went to the window and looked out I'll be hanged if I didn't see her out on the lawn—and a great, white, fuzzy-looking beast was fawning on her and leaping at her and licking her face! Yes, sir, there she stood in a temperature of thirty degrees with nothing but her nightdress on, fondling and playing with that beast as if it were a pet she'd had all her life!"

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Went out after her," he answered simply. "The ground was pretty well frozen and hurt my feet, and I must have looked away once or twice as I tried to pick my way across the lawn, though I tried to keep my eyes on her, for when I reached her the dog was gone and she was standing there alone, her teeth chattering with the cold. I called to her, and she looked—at—me——" the words came slowly, and there was a choke in his voice.

I waited a moment, then patted his shoulder gently. "What was it, boy?" I asked softly.

"She looked at me and *snarled*. You've seen the way a vicious cur curls back its lips when you approach it? That's the way my wife looked at me, Doctor Trowbridge. And down in her throat she made a sort of savage growling noise, like a police dog when he's ready to spring. It frightened me almost senseless for a moment, but I kept on, and she seemed normal enough when I reached her.

" 'My dear, what are you doing out here?' I asked, but she just looked at me in a dazed, half-frightened sort of way, and made no answer. I picked her up and carried her into the house, and put her to bed. She went to sleep immediately. Next morning she remembered nothing, and I didn't press matters, you may be sure. I didn't hear the dog again that night."

"Later?" de Grandin asked softly.

"Yes, sir. Next night, and the next, and every night since then it's howled around the house like a banshee, but though my wife has tossed in her sleep and risen to answer it once or twice, she hasn't gone out again—not to my knowledge, at any rate."

"Now, Norval," I soothed, "all this is very distressing, but I don't think there's anything to be really alarmed about. The other night when Hildegarde fainted and I was tending her, I made a discovery—has she told you?"

"You mean——"

"Just so, boy. Perhaps she's not aware of it, herself, yet, but you have a right to expect some one will be occupying a crib at Twelvetrees before next June. I'm violating no confidences when I tell you more than one patient I've had in similar conditions has been as erratic in behavior as Hildegarde. One lady could not abide the smell of fish, or even their sight. Merely seeing a bowl of goldfish would make her violently sick. Another had an inordinate craving for dried herring, the saltier and smellier the better, and in several cases conditions were so

bad they simulated real insanity, yet all came out right in the end, bore normal, healthy children and became normal, healthy women again. Zoöphilia—an abnormal love of animals—isn't as rare in such circumstances as you might suppose. I'm sure Hildegarde will be all right, son."

The young husband beamed on me, and to my surprize de Grandin concurred in my opinion. "It is so," he assured Norval. "I, too, have seen strange things at times like this. No woman is accountable for anything, however strange it be, which she may do while she bears another life beneath her heart. Assuredly Friend Trowbridge is correct. At present you have little to fear, but both of us will assist you in every manner possible. You have but to call on us, and I entreat you do so the moment anything untoward appears."

"THAT was decent of you, backing me up that way, old chap," I thanked him as the door closed on Fleetwood. "I was in a perfect ague for fear you'd spring some of that occult hocus-pocus of yours and scare the poor lad so we'd have two of 'em to treat instead of one."

He regarded me solemnly, tapping the corner of my desk with the nail of a well-manicured forefinger for emphasis. "I played the unutterable hypocrite," he answered. "No word of what I said did I believe, for I am more than sure a very evil thing has been let into the world, and that much tears—blood, too, perhaps—must be shed before we drive it to its own appointed place again. All that you said concerning the manic-depressive insanity sometimes present in such conditions was true, my friend, but the history of this case differentiates it from those which you recalled. Normal young women may develop a morbid love for animals—I have seen them derive the keenest pleasure from running their fingers over the smooth back of a pussy-cat or the rugged coat of a sheep-dog—but they do not respond to wandering beasts' howling in kind. No. They do not run barefoot into the winter night to fondle wandering brutes; they do not greet their husbands with dog-snarls. These things are different, my friend, but as yet I fear we have seen but the prologue to the play. Still"—he shrugged his shoulders—"trouble will come soon enough—too soon, *parbleu!*—let the poor young Fleetwood be spared as long as possible, for——"

The shrilling of the office telephone cut through his words.

"Doctor Trowbridge?" the tortured voice across the wire asked tremulously. "This is Norval—Norval Fleetwood. I just got home. Hildegarde's gone! Nancy, the colored maid, tells me a dog began howling under the windows almost as soon as I left the house, and Hildegarde seemed to go absolutely wild—hysterical—laughing and crying, and shouting some sort of answer at the beast. Then she let out an answering bay and rushed out into the yard. She's not been back, and Nancy was frightened almost white. She's no idea which way Hildegarde went. What shall I do?"

"Wait a moment," I bade, then retailed his statement to de Grandin.

"*Mordieu,* so soon? I had not thought it!" the Frenchman cried. "Bid him wait for us, *mon vieux,* we come to him at once, right away, immediately!"

"*TIENS,* my friend, they fish in troubled waters who dabble in spiritism," he remarked as we hastened toward Fleetwood's town house in Passaic Boulevard. "Have I not said it before? But certainly."

"Bosh!" I answered testily. "What has spiritism to do with Hildegarde's disap-

pearance? I suppose you're referring to the séance at Twelvetrees? When some smart Alec answered that hound's bay in the dining-room that night it gave the poor girl a dreadful shock. That was all that was needed to set her unbalanced nervous system running wild—she probably wasn't aware of her condition and hadn't taken any care of herself, and recurrent depressive insanity has resulted."

"Oh?" he asked sarcastically. "And since when has depressive insanity or any recognized state of aberration connected with birth made the patient sit up in bed and howl like a dog, or——"

"Of course!" I broke in triumphantly. "Norval gave us a typical symptom when he said she snarled at him. You know as well as I that aversion for the husband is one of the commonest incidents of this form of derangement. She's fought it as hard as she could, poor child, but it's overmastered her. Now she's run away. We may have to keep Norval out of her sight until——"

"What of the dog—as we persist in calling it—which follows her and whose howls she answers in kind?" he insisted. "Do you find it convenient to ignore him, or had he slipped from your memory?"

"Rats!" I scoffed. "The country's full of night-prowling dogs, and——"

"And the city, also?" he broke in. "Dogs which howl beneath ladies' windows the moment their husbands' backs are turned?"

"See here," I turned on him, "just what are you driving at, anyway, de Grandin? What has the dog to do with the case?"

"If it were a dog, little or nothing," he replied slowly. "We might dismiss it as a case of zoöphilia, as you suggested to the young Fleetwood, but——"

"But what?" I demanded. "Out with it. What's your idea?"

"Very well," he nodded solemnly. "Here is my opinion: The 'dog,' as we have called it, is no dog at all, but a wolf, or rather a *loup-garou*, what you call a werewolf, who has availed himself of the opportunity given him by Mademoiselle Noyer's so detestable séance to return and——"

I laughed aloud in spite of myself. "You *are* fantastic!" I told him.

"Let us hope so," he answered grimly. "Jules de Grandin fancies himself most excellently, but in this case nothing would please him more than to see himself proved a superstitious booby. Yes."

"YAS, suh," the colored maid replied to our hurried questions, "Miz Hildegarde done scairt me outa seven years' growth, a'most. Mistu Norval hadn't hardly turned his back on de house when de a'mightiest howlin' yuh ever *did* hear started right underneath Miz Hildegarde's winder, an' Ah like to fainted right where Ah wuz."

"What were you doing? Where were you at the time?" de Grandin asked.

"Well, suh, hit wuz like dis yere: We all'd come in from de country today, an' Miz Hildegarde an' me wuz 'most froze wid de cold. Ah done git me sumpin hot fo' to drink—jest a little gin an' lemon, suh—directly Ah got here, but she didn't want none, though she kep' shiverin' an' shakin' like a little dog that's been flung in de river an' jest swum out an' ain't dry yet. They—Mr. Norval an' Miz Hildegarde—had dinner about seven o'clock, an' Ah had mine at de same time, 'cause Ah knowed Miz Hildegarde'd be wantin' me directly. Pore thing, she ain't been feelin' so pert lately. So, soon's they's finished Ah gits up to her room an' waits there fo' her. Ah'd helped her outa her dress an' jest got a black-chiffon negly-jay on her when Mistu Norval

comes to say he's goin' over to see Doctor Trowbridge. Yessuh.

" 'Bout five minutes later, Ah 'speck hit wuz, whilst Ah wuz brushin' Miz Hildegarde's hair, Ah hears all sudden-like, de awfulest hollerin' an' yellin' under de winder.

" 'Nancy!' Miz Hildegarde says to me, 'does yuh hear dat?'

" 'Certainly, Ah hears it, honey,' Ah says. 'Does yuh think Ah's deef?'

"She kinder walls up her eyes, like de pictures ob de saints 'bout to git kilt by de lions yuh sees, an' says, real fast-like, 'No, no; Ah won't; Ah won't, Ah tell yuh; Ah *won't!*' An' then she kinder breaks down an' shivers like she'd taken a chill or sumpin, an' sorter turns around to me an' says, 'It's no use, Nancy; he's got me; tell Mistu Norval Ah love——' An' wid dat she stops talkin', an' her lips sorter curls back from her teeth, an' her eyes goes all glassy an' stary, an' she sorter growls way down in her throat, an' her hands sorter balls up into fists, on'y de fingers is stretched out like she wuz goin' to scratch somebody, an'—jest about dat time Ah gits down behind de sofa over yonder, suh, 'cause Ah was pow'ful 'feared she wuz a-goin' to jump on *me.*"

"Yes, and then?" de Grandin asked, his little eyes shining.

"Lawd-a-massy, suh. Den de trouble *did* start. Like to scairt mah haid white! Miz Hildegarde done run over to de winder an' looked out at sumpin down there in de yard, an' yelled sumpin in some foreign words, an' den she took out an' run downstairs like de debbil hisse'f wuz after her, a-howlin' an' yellin' an' carryin' on like she wuz a dawg her own se'f, suh. 'Deed, she did!"

"And can you recall what it was she said when she looked out the window, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Lawdy, no, suh. Ah don't speak no language 'ceptin' English!"

"Think, *Mademoiselle.* Much, a very great much, depends on it. Can not you say what the words sounded like, even though they conveyed no meaning to you?"

The woman rolled her eyes upward and inhaled deeply, compressing her lips and puffing out her cheeks as though she would force memory by the very pressure of pent-up breath. At length:

"Hit sounded like she said 'jere raven,' suh," she replied, expelling the breath from her packed lungs with an explosive gasp. "Not perzackly 'raven,' suh, but sumpin like hit. Dat's de neares' Ah can come to hit. Yuh see, Ah wuz so scairt Ah wuzn't takin' no proper notice ob what she *said.* What she wuz gwine to *do* wuz what int'rested me, suh."

"Jere raven; jere raven?" de Grandin muttered musingly to himself. "Jere——

"Barbe d'un porc, I have it! *Je reviens* —I return—I come back! That was it; *n'est-ce-pas, Mademoiselle?*" he turned inquiringly to the maid.

"Yas, suh; dat's jes' what she said, like Ah done tole yuh. 'Jere raven;' dat's hit!"

He cast a swift, triumphant glance at me. "What have you now to say, my old one?" he demanded.

"Nothing, only——"

"Très bon. Say the 'nothing' now; the 'only' will wait till later. Let us first seek Madame Hildegarde."

A hurry call was put in to police headquarters, and for upward of three hours we patrolled the cold, deserted streets, but neither sight nor information of Hildegarde Fleetwood could we obtain. At last, cold, exhausted and discouraged, we turned back, dreading Norval's tragic eyes when we reported failure.

Beside the front portico of the house

we paused a moment while I spread my lap-robe over the engine-hood, for I had not yet put on my winter radiator-front. As I turned toward the steps, a feeble, whimpering moan from the copse of dwarf spruce beside the porch attracted my attention. A moment later we had parted the evergreens, and de Grandin flashed the light of his pocket lamp into the shadow under them.

Hildegarde Fleetwood crouched huddled in a heap in an angle of the wall, the flimsy black-chiffon pajama negligée she wore torn to tatters, one black-satin mule hanging to her delicate, unstockinged foot by its heel-strap, the other only heaven knew where. Beneath the rents in her diaphanous costume cancelli of deep, angry scratches showed, her feet were bruised and bleeding and stained with red-clay mud above the ankles, other patches of earth-soil were on her knees and hands and arms, and the nails of every carefully-cared-for finger were grimy with fresh earth and broken to the quick. Earth-stains were on her face and clotted in her hair, too, as though she might have wiped her countenance and put back the flowing veil of her long, bronze hair with clayey hands while she performed some arduous task.

"Good Lord!" I cried, stooping to gather the all but frozen girl in my arms and bear her up the steps.

The little Frenchman aided me as best he could, lighting my way with his pocket torch, leaping before me to fling wide the storm- and vestibule-doors. "At last," he murmured softly, "at last, my friend, you do assume the proper attitude and call upon the Lord. We shall have much need of His aid before we finish—and of the aid of Jules de Grandin, likewise."

We hurried restorative treatment as much as possible. A sponge bath of chilled water, followed by a rubdown with alcohol and gentle massage with dry flannel cloths restored her circulation, and a cup of hot beef tea administered in spoonful doses brought some semblance of color to her pallid cheeks. We watched for any symptoms of congestion, but were at last satisfied that Hildegarde had suffered nothing worse than shock, and so we gave a bromide sedative and left, impressing Norval with the importance of calling us immediately if any change in her condition came.

I shook my head despondently as we drove toward my house. "This case appears more serious than I'd thought at first," I finally admitted.

"Much," de Grandin nodded emphatically. "Very much, my friend. Very damn much, indeed. Yes. Certainly."

"*MORDIEU,* my worst fears are all confirmed! It is devilish, infernal, no less! Read, my friend, read and weep, then say whose diagnosis was wrong, who talked the words of the fool concerning poor, bedeviled Madame Hildegarde, if you please!" Jules de Grandin cried as he perused the *Morning Journal* next day at breakfast. He thrust the paper at me with hands which trembled with excitement, indicating the item in the upper right-hand angle of the first page:

GHOULS OPEN GIRL'S GRAVE

Remove Body From Casket, Steal Lily From Dead Hands and Leave Remains Uncovered

Woman in Black Sought

Called at Cemetery Earlier in Night and Frightened Sexton

Ghouls, working in the silence of St. Rose's R. C. Cemetery, on the Andover Rd. two miles north of Harrisonville, it became known early today, dug up from a freshly made grave the body of Miss Monica Doyle, 16, daughter of Patrick Doyle, 163 Willow Ave., Harrisonville, who died last Wednesday and was buried yesterday morning.

From the slender hands crossed on the dead

girl's breast, clasping a rosary and the stem of a white lily, the ghouls stole the flower and carried it away.

The corpse, with its shroud and burial clothing disordered and torn, was thrown back face down in the casket, the lid replaced and the grave left open.

The crime, with its weird settings and the added mystery of the visit to the cemetery earlier in the night of a strange black-robed woman accompanied by a monstrous white dog, who frightened the sexton, Andrew Fischer, was disclosed early this morning when Ronald Flander, 25, and Jacob Rupert, 31, grave-diggers, going to prepare a grave for an early morning funeral, noticed the fresh earth heaped up by the Doyle girl's violated grave and, going nearer, discovered the unearthed casket and corpse.

Desecration of Miss Doyle's grave forms one of the most remarkable crimes in the annals of New Jersey since the murder of Sarah Humphreys 5 years ago, the scene of which was the golf links of the Sedgemoor Country club which is slightly more than two miles distant from the cemetery and also abuts on the Andover Rd.

One theory advanced is that a person possessed of religious fanaticism, swayed by the superstition that a lily buried with a body will thrive on the corpse, committed the deed to remove the flower.

The police are now running down scores of clues in an effort to solve the mystery and an arrest is promised within 24 hours.

I finished the grisly account, then stared in wide-eyed horror at de Grandin. "This *is* terrible—devilish—as you say," I admitted. "Who——"

"*Ah bah,* who asks what overset the cream-jug when the cat emerges from the *salle à manger* with whitened whiskers?" he shot back. "Come, let us go. There is no time to lose."

"Go? Where?"

"To the cemetery of St. Rose, of course. Come, quick; haste, my friend. The police, in pursuit of the scores of clues so glibly talked of by our journalistic friend, may have already obliterated all that which would be useful to us. *Nous verrons.*"

"D'ye think they'll really make an arrest?"

"God forbid," he answered piously. "Come, for heaven's love; hurry, *mon vieux,* I beseech you!"

A SMALL egg-shaped stove, crammed with mixed soft coal and coke, and glowing dully red, heated the little cement-block office of St. Rose's Cemetery to mid-August temperature and made mock of the December wind whistling about the angles of the house and wrestling with the bare-limbed trees which dotted the dismal little burial park. Mr. Fischer, a round-faced, blue-eyed man in early middle age who looked as though he would have been more at home standing in white jacket behind a delicatessen counter, nodded us casual greeting from behind the copy of the *Morgen Zeitung* he was perusing with interest. "From the newspapers?" he inquired. "Can't tell you nothin' more'n you already know. Can't you fellers leave me have no peace? I'm busy this mornin', an'——"

"So much is obvious," de Grandin cut in with a quick smile which took the edge from his irony, "but we will take but a moment of your time. Meanwhile, as your minutes are precious, perhaps you would accept a small compensation for a little information?" There was a flash of green, and a banknote changed hands with the rapidity of a prestidigitator's card disappearing. Mr. Fischer's slightly bored manner gave way to one of urbane alertness. "Sure, what can I do for you gents?" he wanted to know.

The little Frenchman produced his cigarette case, proffered it to Fischer and selected a smoke for himself with infinite care. "First of all," he replied, "we desire to know of the mysterious lady in black whose appearance has been commented on. You can tell us of her, perhaps?"

"Sure can," the other volunteered. "It was about half-past nine or ten o'clock she like to scared a lung out o' me. We close th' main gates at eight an' th' footpath gates at half-past nine, an' I'd just

locked the small gate and gotten ready to hit th' hay when I heard it flappin' an' bangin' in th' wind. It was pretty bad last night, you know. I went out to see what th' matter was, an' darned if th' lock hadn't broken. It was kind o' old an' rusty, anyhow, but it oughtn't to have broken in an ordinary wind-storm. I tinkered with it awhile, but couldn't do nothin' with it, so I went to look for a piece o' rope or wire or somethin' to tie it shut.

"There's a tool shed over th' other end o' th' lot—other side o' th' consecrated ground, where suicides an' unbaptized children an' th' like o' that is buried, right by th' pauper section—an' I thought most likely I'd find what I was lookin' for there. Th' men dumps everythin' they don't happen to be usin' in it. Well, sir, just as I was cuttin' across to that shed, who should jump up out o' nowhere but a great, long, tall woman with th' biggest an' ugliest brute of a dog you ever seen standing right alongside her. *Gott in Himmel!*" — he dropped his idiomatic American for the language of his fatherland—"I was frightened!"

The Frenchman thoughtfully flicked a half-inch of ash on the worn linoleum rug covering the room's cement floor. "And can you describe her?" he asked slowly, shooting me a quick glance, then regarding the curling smoke from his cigarette with careful scrutiny.

Mr. Fischer considered a moment. "I ain't sure," he replied. "It was so sudden, th' way she bobbed up from nowhere, an' I don't mind admittin' I was more anxious to run than stand there an' look at her. She was pretty tall, half a head taller than th' average woman, I'd say at a guess, an'—well, I suppose you could call her pretty, too. Kind o' thin an' straight, with great, long hair all blowin' round her face an' shoulders, dressed in some sort o' black robe with no sleeves, an'—an' kind o'—I don't know just how to say it, sir. Sort o' *devilish*-lookin', you might say."

"Devilish? How?"

"Well, she had a kind o' smile on her face, like she was pleased to meet me there, but more pleased I was alone—if you get me. More of a snarl than a smile, you'd call it; kind o' pleased an' savage-lookin' at th' same time.

"An' that dog! *Mein Gott!* He was big as a calf an' with a long, pointed snout an' great, red mouth hangin' open, an' long, narrow eyes, like a Chinaman's, an' they was flashin' in th' dark, like a cat's!"

"Did they move to attack you?"

"No, sir, I can't say they did. Just stood there, th' dog with one foot raised, like he was ready to jump on me, an' th' woman standin' beside him with her hair all blowin' about her an' one hand on th' beast's back, an' *th' both of 'em growled at me!* So help me, th' beast growled first, an' th' woman did th' same.

"I didn't waste no time gettin' away from there, I can tell you!"

"You have no idea from whence they came?"

"None whatever."

"Nor where they went thereafter?"

"Not me. I got back here as fast as I could an' locked th' door an' moved th' desk against it!"

"U'm. And may one see the grave of the so unfortunate Mademoiselle Doyle?"

Racial antipathy flared in Fischer's eyes as de Grandin used the French title, but memory of recent largess was more potent than inherited hatred. "Sure," he agreed, with markedly lessened cordiality, and slipped a stained sheepskin reefer over his shoulders. "Come on."

Casket and earth had been replaced in the violated sepulcher, but the raw red

earth showed like a bleeding wound about the place where Monica Doyle lay in everlasting slumber.

The little Frenchman observed surroundings carefully, sank to his knees to take a closer view of the trampled mud about the refilled grave, then rose with a nod. "And now, if you will be so good as to show us where you encountered the so strange visitants last night, we shall no longer trouble you," he told the sexton.

THE cemetery was a small one, and obviously catered to a far from wealthy clientele. Few graves were properly mounded, and more briars than flowers evidently grew there in the summer. Now, in bleak December, it held an air of desolation which depressed me like a strain of melancholy music. Bare and desolate as the better portions of the park were, however, the section set aside for indigents and those who died without the pale was infinitely worse. No turf, save weed crab-grass, hid the bare, red clay from view, the graves were fallen in and those which sported markers were more pathetic than those unmarked, for mere white-painted boards or stones so crudely carved that any beggar might scorn to own them were all the monuments. Midway between the garden-plots of hopelessness the superintendent paused. "Here's where it was," he announced curtly, eyeing de Grandin with no friendly glance. "Make it snappy; I'm busy—can't stand here in th' cold all day."

Once more de Grandin surveyed the terrain. Sinking to his knees he looked minutely at the red and sticky mud where Fischer had been frightened, then rose, and with a queer, abbreviated stride, moved toward the lines of leafless Lombardy poplars which served as wind-break by the rear fence of the graveyard.

"Hey, I can't wait no longer," the superintendent warned. "Got a lot o' things to do. See me in my office if you want to ask me anything else," with which announcement he turned upon his heel and left us.

"Sale caboche," de Grandin muttered, casting a level stare of cold hatred at the sexton's retreating back. "No matter, you have served your turn; your absence is the best gift you can give us. Quick, Friend Trowbridge, stand before me, if you please."

From his waistcoat pocket he produced his cigarette lighter and set it flaring, and from the pocket of his topcoat he took a length of paraffin candle. "I thought we might have need of this," he explained as he proceeded to melt the grease and pour it carefully into the imprint of a tiny, slender shoe which showed in the wet clay.

"Whatever are you doing?" I asked, standing before him to shield him from the wind and the glance of any curious passers-by at once.

"Parbleu, I do construct a brick house in which to store your senseless questions!" he answered with a grin, tamping the hot paraffin daintily into the depression, then waiting anxiously for it to harden.

As soon as the impression had been made, he wrapped it carefully in two thick sheets of paper, then, with his find held tenderly as a day-old infant, proceeded methodically to pace across the graveyard, carefully obliterating every feminine footprint he could find. "I doubt the police have taken casts of these," he told me, "but if the good Costello comes into the case he may show more intelligence than most. He has associated much with me, you will recall."

When all had been accomplished to his satisfaction, he steered me toward the

entrance. *"Merci beaucoup, Monsieur l'Allemand-transplanté!"* he called ironically as he lifted his green-felt hat and passed from the cemetery.

"Dam' Frog!" returned Superintendent Fischer, with which exchange of amenities we parted company.

"Slowly, Friend Trowbridge, drive slowly, if you please," he ordered as we left the graveyard, and from his vantage-point beside me he peered from left to right at the scrub vegetation bordering the road. Once or twice at his request I stopped while he alighted and made forays into the undergrowth. Finally, when we had consumed the better part of an hour traversing a quarter-mile, he returned from an investigative trip with a smile of satisfaction. *"Triomphe!"* he announced, holding his find up for my inspection. It was a dainty, French-heeled black-satin bedroom mule, the strap designed to hold it to its wearer's heel torn loose from its stitchings at one end, and the whole smeared with sticky, red-clay mud.

"And now, if you will be so good as to put me down, I shall be very grateful," he informed me as we reached the central part of town.

SOMETHING like an hour later he entered my consulting-room, eyes shining with elation, a smile of satisfaction hovering beneath the needle ends of his diminutive, tightly waxed blond mustache. "Doubting Thomases must have their proof," he told me; *"c'est pourquoi* I bring you yours. *Regardez:*

"This"—he carefully unwrapped a parcel and laid its contents on the desk—"is the impression of the so dainty foot-print which I did take at the cemetery. This"—from his overcoat pocket he fished the satin mule he had salvaged from the roadside—"is what we found near by the cemetery upon our homeward trip. And this"—from another pocket he produced the first satin slipper's mate—"is Madame Hildegarde's shoe which she wore last night when we did find her all unconscious outside her house. I did buy it from the *femme de chambre* whom we interviewed last night but one little hour ago. Yes. Now, attend me:

"You will observe the shoes are identical, save one is broken, the other whole. You will notice both are stained with identical red mud—the mud of St. Rose's Cemetery. Now, you will notice, each fits the impression I took among the graves. *Enfin,* they are each other's mates, the shoes of Madame Hildegarde which she wore last night—into the cemetery when she and that wolf-thing which companioned her dug up the corpse of Mademoiselle Doyle! She was the so mysterious 'woman in black,' my friend, and —*par pitié de Dieu!*—her companion was the revenant spirit of Gilles Garnier, the werewolf of St. Bonnot, which slipped through the door Mademoiselle Noyer let open at her never-to-be-enough-reprobated séance that Sunday night at Twelve-trees!

"Laugh, snicker, grin like a dog! I tell you it is so! *Plût à Dieu* it were otherwise!"

"I'm not laughing," I answered soberly. "I was inclined to think you were at your favorite game of phantom-fighting at first; but the developments in this case have been so strange and dreadful I'm willing to let you take full charge. We've seen some strange, terrible things together, de Grandin, and I'm not inclined to scoff now. But tell me——"

"Everything I can!" he cut in impetuously, holding out his hands. "What is it you would know?"

"If Hildegarde's animal companion really were a werewolf, why did they un-

earth the body of the Doyle girl? I've always heard werewolves attacked the living."

"And also the dead," he replied. "There are different grades among them; some kill dogs and sheep, but fight mankind only when attacked, some are like hyenas, and prey upon the dead, others—the worst—lust after human flesh, especially human blood, and quest and kill women, children, even men, when weaker game is not available. In this case, this vile Garnier perchance chose the helpless dead for victim for their raid because——"

"*Their* raid?" I echoed in horror. "*Their*——"

"Alas, yes. It is too true. Poor, unfortunate Madame Hildegarde has become even as her conqueror and master, Gilles Garnier. She, too, is *loup-garou*. She, too, is of that multitudinous herd not yet made fast in hell. Recall how she cried out, 'No, no, I will not come!' last night, then, turning to her maid, said, 'It is no use, he has me!' Also how she charged the *femme de chambre* with a farewell message of love for her husband ere she ran howling from the house to join her ghostly master? Remember, too, how her nails were all mud-stained and broken when we found her? Assuredly, she had been digging in the grave beside that other one. Yes."

"Then why didn't they——" I began, but the question stuck in my throat. "Why didn't they—eat——" I stopped, nauseated.

"Because of what the dead girl's dead hands clasped," he answered. "The lily they could ravish away and tear to bits—I found shreds of it embedded in the mud beside the grave, though the police and others overlooked it—but the blessèd Rosary and the body assoiled with prayer and incense and holy water—*ha, pardieu,* those defied them, and they could do no more than vent their futile, baffled rage upon the corpse and offer it gross insult and cast it back into its coffin. No."

He took a quick half-turn across the room, retraced his steps, snatched a cigarette from his case and set it aglow with savage energy. "Attend me," he ordered, seating himself on the corner of the desk and fixing me with a level, unwinking stare.

"You are familiar with the so-called 'new psychology' of Freud and Jung, at least you have a working knowledge of it. Very well, then, consider: You know there is no such thing as true forgetfulness. Every gross desire—every hatred, every passion, every lust the conscious, waking mind experiences is indexed and pigeon-holed in the recesses of the subliminal mind. Those whose conscious recollection is free from every vestige of envy, malice, hatred or lust may go to a séance, and there liberate all the repressed—the 'forgotten'—evil desires they have had since early childhood without being in anywise aware of it. We know from our study of psychology that fixed, immutable laws govern mental processes. There is, by example, the law of similarity, which evokes the association of ideas; there is the law of integration, which splits mental images into integral fragments, and the law of re-integration, which enables the subconscious mind to rearrange these split images into one completed picture of a past event or scene as one fits together the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

"Very good. Ten or a dozen people seat themselves in silence around a table, every condition for light hypnosis is present—lack of external attractions of the attention, darkness, a common focusing of thought upon a single objective, that of attracting spirits. In such conditions

the sitters may be said to 'pool their consciousness'—the normal inhibitions of the conscious mind are relieved from duty. The sentry sleeps and the fortress gates are open! Conditions for invasion are ideal.

"*Eh bien,* my friend, do not think the enemy is slow to take advantage of his opportunity. By no means. If there be even one person at the séance whose subconsciousness locks up any unholy desires —and who has been entirely free from thought-dominance by one of the Seven Deadly Sins throughout his life?—the Powers of Evil have a ready-made ally within the gates. That like attracts like is a dominant law of nature, and the law of similarity is one of the rules of psychology. The gateway of the *psyche* is thrown open to whoever may enter in.

"Now, who would be the easiest one attacked? Madame Hildegarde is not well. Her blood-stream, her whole system, must care for two instead of one, thereby lessening her powers of resistance.

"Very good. A sign? Consider what occurred. A rapping announces a man-spirit, seeking communication. His name is asked. He answers. *Eh bien,* I shall say he answers! He gives his real name, for there is little fear that any one present will recognize him. 'Gilles Garnier, who lived at St. Bonnot in the reign of King Charles,' he brazenly announces himself. Do you know him, perhaps?" He paused a moment, lifting his brows interrogatively.

"Why, no, I never heard of him," I answered.

"*Bien.* Neither had any one there present. His name, his nationality, his epoch, all sounded 'romantic' to a circle of fat-headed fools; is it not so? Yes, decidedly.

"*Ha,* but Jules de Grandin knew him! As you have studied the history of medicine and anesthesia and of the recurrent plagues which have scourged the world, so I have studied the history of those other plagues which destroyed the body or the soul, sometimes both together. Listen, I will tell you of Gilles Garnier:

"In 1573, when Charles IX occupied the throne of France, there dwelt at St. Bonnot, near the town of Dôle, a fellow named Gilles Garnier. He was an ill-favored churl, and those who knew him best knew little good of him. He dwelt alone, so that the country folk called him 'the hermit,' but the title carried with it no attribute of sanctity. Quite otherwise.

"Midsummer came that fateful year, and with it numerous complaints to the Parliament of Dôle. Farmers living near the city brought in accounts of sheep stolen from the fold at dead of night, of dogs killed as they watched the flocks, of little children found dead and horribly mangled along the roadside and beneath the hedges. Three wandering minstrels —all veterans of the wars and stout swordsmen—were set upon as they rode through the wood of St. Bonnot at night, and one of them was all but killed, though they resisted fiercely. The countryside was terrorized and even men-at-arms preferred to stay at home by night, for a *loup-garou,* or werewolf, the like of which had never before been known, had claimed the land for his own from sunset until dawn.

"On the evening of November 8, 1573, when the fields were all but nude of vegetation and the last leaves reluctantly parting company with the trees, three laborers were hurrying to their homes at Chastenoy by a woodland short-cut when they heard the screams of a little girl issuing from a dense tangle of vines and undergrowth. And with the

child's cries mingled the baying of a wolf.

"Swinging their billhooks, they cut themselves a pathway through the wildwood, and hastened toward the sounds. In a little clearing they beheld this terrifying sight: Backed against a tree, defending herself as best she might with her shepherd's crook, was a little maid of ten, already bleeding from a score of wounds, while before her crouched a monstrous creature which never ceased its devilish baying as it attacked her tooth and nail.

"As the peasants ran forward the thing fled off into the forest on all fours, disappearing instantly in the darkness. The men would have followed, but the fainting, sorely wounded child demanded their attention."

He paused to light another cigarette, then: "In court," he asked, "when there is contrariety of testimony, supposing all witnesses had equal opportunity of observation, which version would be believed?"

"Why, that supported by the greatest number of witnesses, I suppose," I answered.

"Very good. That seems logical, does it not? Consider then: Next day, when these peasants laid their story before the authorities, one swore the child's assailant had a man's body, though it was covered with hair and ran on all fours; the other two declared as positively it had the body of a gaunt, light-gray wolf, *but the eyes of a man.*

"You will recall, perhaps, the amiable Monsieur Fischer declared this morning that the brute which frightened him last night had 'eyes like a *Chinaman*'? Very well.

"November 14, 1573, a little boy of eight disappeared. The child had last been seen within a crossbow's range of the city gates, yet he had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed him. *Morbleu,* swallowed he had been, but not by the earth! No.

"Circumstantial evidence involved this so unsaintly hermit, Gilles Garnier. A *sergent de ville* and six arquebusiers went forth to arrest him and took him into custody shortly after noon on November 16. His trial followed quickly.

"It is a curious circumstance, often commented on, that those involved in such crimes seldom needed to be put to the question, but readily confessed when finally their sin had found them out. It was usually so in witchcraft trials; it was so in this. Garnier readily admitted making a compact with the Devil whereby he was given the power of transforming himself into a wolf at will, providing he willed it between darkness and cock-crow.

"Witnesses in flocks appeared against him. The *trouveurs* who had been attacked appeared, and so did many a farmer whose sheepfold had been raided; but the little maid the peasants saved near Chastenoy was strongest in her testimony, for she identified the prisoner *by his eyes.* Furthermore, when an impression of his teeth was taken, it matched precisely with the tooth-marks in her half-healed scars. The werewolf keeps his human teeth, as well as eyes, while metamorphosized, it seems.

"Garnier admitted the attack and added tales of many others to it. On the last day of Michaelmas, near the wood of La Serre, while in his wolf-form, he had attacked with teeth and claws a little girl of ten or twelve, dragged her into a thicket and gnawed the flesh from her arms and legs. There were those who corroborated his story in part, by telling of the finding of the little mutilated corpse.

"On the fourteenth day after All

Saints, also in the form of a wolf, he had killed and eaten a little boy. On Friday before the feast of St. Bartholomew he had seized and killed a lad of twelve near the village of Perrouze, and would have eaten him but for the appearance of some peasants. These men were found and corroborated the prisoner's story, and again conflict of testimony appeared. Some swore he was in human form, though fur-covered and going on all fours; the others deposed he had a true wolf's form. All were agreed he howled and growled like any natural beast.

"By the way," he broke off, "can you recall the date Mademoiselle Noyer convoked her séance at Twelvetrees?"

"Why—er"—I made a hasty mental calculation—"yes, of course. It was the twenty-sixth of November."

"Précisément," he nodded gravely. "And it was upon November 26, 1573, that Gilles Garnier, forever after to be known as the werewolf of St. Bonnot, having duly been found guilty, was dragged for half a mile over a rough road by ropes attached to his ankles, bound to a stake and given to the flames."

"Coinci——" I began doubtfully, but:

"Coinci—devil!" he snapped. "Coincidences like that do not occur, my friend. For almost four and a half centuries this man's wicked, earthbound soul had hovered in the air, invisible, but very potent. Upon the anniversary of his execution his memory is strongest, for jealousy of life, and rage, and eagerness to return and raven once again are greatest then. He beats against the portal of our world like the wolf against the doors of *les trois petit cochons* in the nursery-story, and where he finds a door weak enough—*he breaks through!* Yes. Indubitably. It is so."

"But see here," I countered, "it's all very well to say he's seized Hildegarde's brain—I shan't dispute it with you—but how is he able to manifest himself physically? It might have been a vision or a ghost or specter, or whatever you wish to call it, that Fischer saw in the cemetery, or that Norval Fleetwood saw sporting with his wife on the lawn at Twelvetrees, but it was no unsubstantial wraith which dug the little Doyle girl from her grave and tossed her poor, desecrated body back into its casket. It won't do to say Hildegarde did it. Even granting she had the supernatural strength of the insane, the task would have been physically impossible for her to perform unaided."

"Incomparable Trowbridge!" he cried delightedly. "Always, when it looks darkest, you do show me a light in the blackness. To you I and Madame Hildegarde owe our salvation. No less!"

I stared at him open-mouthed. "What in the world——" I began, but he cut me short with a delighted gesture.

"Attend me carefully," he ordered. "You have resolved a most damnably complex problem into a most simple solution. Yes. You know—or at least I so inform you—that one of the common phenomena associated with spiritistic séances is the production of light. Numerous mediums have the power of attracting or emitting light, and even in small, amateur circles where there is in all truth little enough 'light' in the psychic sense, such elemental phenomena are produced. Very good. What is this light? Some of it may be true spirit-phenomena, but mostly it is nothing but human mental energy manifested as light waves, and given off by the concerted thought of the circle of sitters at the séance. But at times this essence given off is something more substantial than the mere emission of vibrations capable of being recognized as

(Continued on page 856)

Burnt Things

by ROBERT C SANDISON

"Come with us into the nice warm fire."

"DE NEXT town am Como, sah!" said the porter, lugubriously. He said it in much the same tone that he might have used in announcing that my coffin awaited.

I swore under my breath, impatiently. This confounded mystery was getting on my nerves. First the ticket agent at Ralston.

"Como?" he had said blankly. "You want a ticket for *Como?*" The inference plainly was that no human being in his right mind could ever wish to go to Como. "Oh—uh—ticket for Como, yessir."

And then the conductor. The way he had stared at my ticket and at me, and finally asked, as if doubting the evidence of his eyes: "You're going to Como, are you?"

"For heaven's sake," I answered, "why shouldn't I be going there?"

He had looked at me oddly and shook his head without answering.

And then at the junction where the train had changed crews, the new conductor had repeated the performance.

"Been there since the fire?" he asked, when he was finally assured of my destination.

I shook my head. I remembered reading in the papers that a month or so before, the sugar factory at Como had burned under queer circumstances, and the death list had been appalling. It had taken half the town with it, and I thought the mystery was explained. When half a town of two hundred population burns, the remnant is scarcely visible to the naked eye, and certainly could hold little attraction for the visitor.

"You know there ain't any—ain't many

people there now," the conductor persisted.

I hate making explanations, but he was plainly awaiting one.

"I'm visiting friends on a ranch near there."

"Oh, that's different." His voice indicated positive relief. "They'll be waiting to meet you, I suppose."

"Why, no, they won't. It's a surprize visit. I'll stop in the village over night, and hire someone to drive me out next morning."

"Stop there over night?" The conductor spoke so sharply that I jumped. "Say, if there's no one to meet you—say, it's only ten miles into San Benito. Why don't you ride on down there and catch Number One back in the morning. Then you'll get there in daylight."

"I'm not scared of the dark," I said, with what I hoped was withering sarcasm. "Please have the porter make up my berth. I'll knock off a little sleep before we get there."

The conductor opened his mouth two or three times, but finally went his way without speaking. He was back in a few minutes with the porter, to whom he spoke heavily:

"Take good care of this gentleman, Sam. He's going to Como."

"Fo' de Lawd's sake!" The negro's eyes and mouth both popped wide.

"I am!" I said irritably. "And please make up my berth!"

The conductor passed on down the aisle, and the porter, after a moment of goggle-eyed amazement, began to prepare the berth.

"You'll be sure and wake me in time?" I added.

"Yessuh, yessuh!" The negro spoke abstractedly; then turning to face me: "Boss, does yo' know yo'll git in there at one o'clock in the mo'nin'?"

"What about it?" I asked.

"Ever'body done moved away from there, boss, 'scusin' one old geezer; what'd make good food fo' the squirrels."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Sorta weak in the haid. An' then there's—there's—say, boss, you been there since the fire?"

"No."

"Funny things goin' on there, boss—funny things. Lots o' men died in that fire, an' they do say as how it was set."

"An incendiary fire? Yes, I read of it. And I suppose the ghosts of the burned come back for vengeance?"

"All right! All right, boss! Laugh as much as yo' want to. But she's a mighty queer place fo' to spend a night in!"

I turned away impatiently, and as soon as the blankets were spread, turned in. I was half tempted to ride on into San Benito, as the conductor had suggested. But after all I had said, that might be construed into a confession that I *was* afraid of the dark! So I remained silent, and presently dropped asleep.

"De next town am Como, sah!" the porter had said, and I sat up sleepily and began drawing on my clothes.

"Listen, boss. Be a lot safer if yo' was to ride on to San Benito with us."

I had been thinking the same thing myself, but this only stiffened my determination to leave the train there, if I died for it. But of late I've been valuing my life more highly.

I HAD scarcely finished dressing when the train began to slow down, and I hurried out to the vestibule. The porter dropped the steps, his eyes rolling uneasily over his shoulder. I was scarcely on the ground when he hurled the steps back into the car, and followed them so fast that his white coat fairly blurred, in the darkness.

"De Lawd take keer o' yo', boss," he said as the train chugged out. It gathered speed so rapidly, it almost seemed the en-

gineer was anxious to leave Como behind —far behind.

"Nice, cheerful cuss," I murmured, as I picked up my suitcase and stared doubtfully around me.

It had been more than a year since I had been in the village, and the fire had changed the face of things vastly. The gutted factory still dominated the town, however, as of yore. Its broken, fire-blackened walls still towered jaggedly, out there across the tracks.

The depot was a mere heap of ashes, as were all the near-by houses, but up where Main Street had been some brick buildings had partly withstood the flames. Apparently they had also acted as a fire-stop, for other houses beyond there seemed to be untouched. I wondered why people should abandon perfectly good homes in that fashion.

I picked up my suitcase and set out. There were no lights showing, but knowing that the old man at least still lived in the village, it shouldn't take long to locate him. And after all, Jim's ranch was only six or eight miles away, if walk I must.

There was something horribly depressing about the deserted street—as if I were walking in a village of the dead. I found myself thinking of the entire families who had perished in the fire—of the two score men trapped in the factory and incinerated.

It was no sort of thing to ponder on at one o'clock in the morning—even though the fresh, clean smell of western prairies swept in out of the darkness. For it had been raining that day and heavier and nearer at hand was the smell of wet ashes and dead embers.

I gained the main street and stood looking helplessly about. I had no idea in which house the old man might live, and it looked as if I might shift for myself in one of the unburned buildings.

"Good evening," said a voice, pleasantly.

I had not heard the man approach. I must have broken all records for a standing high jump. He stood close behind me, dressed in the greasy clothes of a factory laborer, with a cap pulled far down over his face.

"You startled me," I said with a laugh. "I was beginning to think I was the only person in the village."

"Old John Barry's still here," said the stranger. "You'll find him over yonder. He never comes over here where the fire was."

"I'd like to find him," I admitted. "I'll have to stay in town over night, until I can get transportation out to Jim Donnelly's ranch."

"He sleeps all day and prowls around all night, so you'll find him all right—over yonder."

I thanked him and turned away, when he took two quick steps forward and rubbed both hands violently along my overcoat. Then he vanished among the ruins, so quickly it seemed as if he had vaporized into air.

Perhaps he was the lunatic the porter had described, I thought as I crossed the street. Certainly he had been dabbling among the wet ashes, for he smelt abominably of burning, and some of the smell had transferred itself to my coat.

FINDING old Barry proved no difficult task. I had gone scarcely a block beyond Main Street when I saw him, coming toward me.

He was no inspiring sight. An old, old man, with scraggly, grizzled hair; a mouth that held only the stumps of teeth; a face netted with a thousand wrinkles. No dignity of age was here; rather, a maniacal glitter in the sunken eyes, a lunatic leer in the twisted face. It made me no

easier in mind to see that he leaned on a shotgun in lieu of a cane.

He stopped as I approached, and stood eyeing me warily.

"Mr. Barry, I suppose?" I began.

He made no answer.

"The town's rather deserted since I was here last." And I paused, feeling the remark was scarcely tactful.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked gruffly.

"Ralston," I said, taking a step or two forward. "I'm here to visit friends on a ranch south of here. And now I'm——"

I stopped again. Undoubtedly the old man was shrinking away from me. I got the idea he was *smelling* me: certainly he was sniffing at something—that unpleasant smell of scorching on my overcoat, I supposed.

And then he screamed. A wild, goblin wail, it was.

"You're one of them! Don't tell me! You're one of them. With the smell of burnin' on your clothes. An' you come from across the street! I knowed it! I knowed it! Knowed sometime you'd come across after me!"

"Listen," I said, "I've no idea what you're talking about!" (Though I had an uneasy feeling I knew all too well!) "All I want is a night's lodging, for which I'll pay——"

He screamed again, disregarding me.

"Put you in my house? So it has to be in a house, does it?" His face writhed in stark madness. He threw up the shotgun. "Get back where you belong! You don't belong over here! Get back! I'll shoot!"

I tried to speak but he refused to listen. And the twin muzzles were pointing directly at my belt buckle. I backed away. He followed me.

I remembered that lunatic fellow with the smell of ashes on him had said Barry never crossed Main Street into the ruins. Then here was an easy way to rid myself of him.

I increased my backward pace a little and he pressed after me—and burst into cackling laughter.

"Afraid of me! Yessir, afraid of me! An' for weeks I been afraid of you! Ho! ho! ho! Get back there!"

We reached Main Street and I started across, backward. At the curb, the old man hesitated a moment, looking from me to the blackened ruins beyond. Then, half fearfully, he put one foot off the curb, then the other. Slowly, as a man wades into deep water, he followed.

Not so good. Being marched through a village of the dead by a maniac at one-thirty in the morning is no experience to be envied. I looked around for the other lunatic but he was nowhere in sight.

We crossed the street and I plodded slowly backward toward the depot. And the old man followed me. We were already half the distance, when I saw a shadowy figure creep from behind a broken wall.

The old man was still babbling insanely.

"I killed you before! And I can kill you again. Kill you so you'll stay dead! Afraid of me! Ho! ho! ho!"

And then the figure leaped. The old man screamed shrilly as the gun was twisted from his grasp; as he was swung aloft in a fireman's carry to the other's shoulders.

"Much obliged!" I said with heartfelt relief. "They shouldn't let a lunatic like that run loose——"

The man had made no answer. He was plodding methodically down the street, with old Barry still swung across his shoulders.

"Where are you taking him?" I asked curiously.

"To the factory," said the man shortly. I recognized the voice as that of the man who smelt of ashes.

And then old Barry recommenced his screaming. God! such rending screams, like a lost soul in endless anguish.

"Don't! Don't let them take me! Don't —oh Jesus, help me!"

"What are you going to do with him?" I insisted.

"Come along and see!" And the man gave a little, throaty chuckle.

I thought then it was the wind whistling, for the chuckle seemed to be echoed and re-echoed through the ruins, as if each separate brick and fallen timber were enjoying some ghoulish joke.

I hesitated a moment, and followed. Even though old Barry were a lunatic, so, unquestionably, was his captor. And knowing something of the strength of madmen, I thoughtfully retrieved the shotgun.

Straight down the street, past the depot, across the tracks, up the driveway to the factory, I followed. Once, I remembered, that driveway had been lined with cottonwoods. Now only their charred and blackened trunks towered, lifeless, to the sky. And though I looked about a score of times and could see nothing, I could have sworn a host accompanied us. There was the rustle of many feet through the ashes, the plod of them in the dusty road, and always a subdued, ghoulish chuckling—a chuckling almost drowned in the ceaseless screaming of Old Barry.

The great driveway door was nearly choked with debris, but we threaded our way through it, and inside the door Barry was lifted high in the air and dashed violently to the floor.

I leaped forward. Lunatic or not, I wouldn't see him killed. I caught his captor by the shoulder and swung him violently about. His cap, loosened by the jerk, slipped back on his head.

And what had once been a face leered up into mine. No nose, no lips, no eyes; only fragments of charred flesh clinging to blackened bones. And the smell of scorching meat——

I SCREAMED as I leaped back and turned to run. And the subdued chuckle rose to a mighty roar of horrible laughter. And I stopped. For something was forming between me and the doorway—something that made the heaps of blackened rubbish look hazy and misty. It was as if a gauze curtain had been pulled down.

And the curtain was moving, swaying, as if in some unfelt breeze. It was knotting and twisting — separating into distinct forms.

The old man was moaning faintly, yet he still lay motionless on the floor, where he had been hurled.

I looked again at the curtain. It had melted into separate units now. They seemed to be drifting toward us. And then again, I screamed my loudest.

Forms of men, they were—or had been. But men with arms—with legs—burned away; with twisted, seared, blackened faces; with great patches of charred skin clinging to burned, black flesh. And skeletons with only bits of flesh still hanging on the incinerated bones. And the smell—oh God!

Did you ever smell meat burning and charring in the oven? Imagine that smell multiplied a thousand times—the reek of searing human flesh, of red-hot, crumbling bones. And there were the contorted faces of men cooked alive—fire-blackened faces still twisted and set in the last fierce agony of death.

I screamed as I threw up the shotgun. Its double report shook the tottering walls. The shot sprayed through that curtain and harmlessly into the rubbish beyond. And still the things came on, with ghastly arms outstretched.

My recent rescuer gave a loud shout. His clothing fell away, revealing his fire-

racked body. He joined the slowly drifting throng.

Old Barry was on his feet now, backing slowly away, his eyes fixed on those burned things with the horrible fascination of a bird charmed by a snake. With all my heart I wanted to turn, to run, but to turn my back on those horrors—I could not.

Slowly we backed away together among the heaps of rubbish, of wrecked machinery, from the fallen roof and second floor. Past the beet-slicers, past the big cookers, down through the beet-end, we crept backward, with the bodies of the dead drifting slowly after us.

Past the Oliver presses, past the centrifugals. We couldn't go much farther. The rear wall towered above us. The doorway to the old warehouse was choked with the wreckage of vacuum pans. I threw an arm across my face. I couldn't bear the sight of those shapeless, fire-racked bodies.

I found the darkness even more unbearable. In fancy, I could feel those bony hands with their scraps of charred, crumbling flesh fastening on me. I screamed again, and pressed tightly against the wall.

There was a chant in the air. Surely it never came from those fleshless, lipless mouths.

"Come with us! Into the fire! The nice, warm fire, John! Come with us!"

"No, no!" The old man was on his knees. "I never meant—I didn't know—don't hurt me! Oh, don't hurt me!"

And still the chant went on:

"The fire! The nice, warm fire!"

They were very close now. I whirled about desperately.

Almost five years before I had worked in the factory. I knew there should be another door—the door to the boiler-house. Could I find it in the darkness and litter? In a maniac rush, I sprang over the piled wreckage. A wave of devastating heat scorched my face as the dead men swept up. There was a crackling of flames among that burned-out rubbish. The old man screamed horribly.

I pressed my hands over my ears as I stumbled and staggered onward. Still I could hear him scream. God, I can hear him yet!

"Jesus! Oh, Lord Jesus! It burns. They're burning me——"

Thank God the little doorway was open and partly clear. I pushed, squeezed, tore my way through the rubbish. I was out in the areaway east of the boiler-house. Those things were behind me—and the old man was still screaming. More faintly, now. And a babble.

"Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus! It burns—it burns——"

With my hands still over my ears, I raced away from that place of madness.

How I reached Jim's ranch I never knew. I don't even remember getting there. It is eight miles from Como. Only, when I opened my eyes, Jim was leaning over me, alternately pouring something raw and fiery down my throat, and shaking me, while shouting:

"Bob! Bob! For God's sake, what's the matter?"

Hallucinations—nightmare—the doctor from San Benito said. And I think Jim believed him, at first. Probably I would have believed him myself, if it hadn't been for my scorched hair and burned face; relic of that searing wave of awful heat.

And Jim believes now, too. For today he handed me a clipping from the San Benito paper:

ANOTHER BODY FOUND AT COMO

Further mystery is added to the great fire at Como by the discovery of the remains of John Barry, former watchman at the factory of the Como Sugar Company.

Readers will recall that Barry was suspected of starting the fire in revenge for what he considered

(Continued on page 856)

The Crime on Christmas Night

by GASTON LEROUX

"Be quiet, my dear."

FIVE old skippers smelling of the sea used to foregather every evening at one of the round tables in front of the old Ship-and-Anchor Café in Toulon to enjoy their aperative and at the same time to tell each other stories of blood and horror. From time to time they were joined by a sixth who seemed to be more of an old sea dog even than Zinzin, he who had spent twenty years coasting up and down the China Seas; than Dorat, the ex-commander of the Dorat expeditions; than Bagatelle, who, in memory of a blissful sojourn on the Island of Siam, had taken a Siamese woman unto wife; than that blackguard Chaulieu, who had carried the benefits of civilization to the aborigines of Western Africa, settled between the Congo and the Niger; than Captain Michel, who still remembered the taste of human flesh after passing several weeks on a raft of the *Medusa,* from which the shipwrecked had escaped with their lives, even though some were minus an arm, others a leg, and all more or less crippled.

This sixth "mariner," Mr. Damour (John-Joseph-Philibert), had gained his entire nautical experience seated at his desk in the offices of the Oriental Transportation Company, and he used to refer in an offhand way to the far-flung Pacific ports of call as we lesser men might speak, say, of some pleasant little fishing cove along the Seine.

To tell the truth, he had never stepped foot on the deck of a ship, nor had he even been outside Paris except on the day when he retired. But his face was so weather-beaten, his skin so tough, his beard so rebellious, his clay pipe so stubby and so "seasoned," his walk so tpically the sailor's sway, that you had only to glance at him and you would exclaim,

*Translated by Morris Bentinck.

"There's one who's weathered many a gale."

He whetted the curiosity of the old salts and they made him welcome when on one unusually crowded day at the café he lifted his Basque beret and asked if he might have a seat at their table. He came again from time to time and it took them some months to grasp the idea that John-Joseph (this was what they called Mr. Damour), who from the beginning made himself known to them as captain, had really never been on any voyage anywhere.

The old fellow used to give such precise details concerning the most distant parts of the globe, setting every one straight who erred on any point; he was so glib with facts about the history of liners from their christening day to the day of their sometimes very dramatic end, that for a long time the skippers kept their doubts to themselves. But on the day when the truth did come out there was the devil to pay! It was their turn now, and it goes without saying that they gave it to him hammer and tongs for the deception. And yet there was one thing they can not figure out at all, and that was how, after thirty years spent behind a desk in a sunless steamship office, scribbling figures in piles of paper, a man could still have a face like "Captain" John-Joseph. "It must be he makes himself up for the part," declared Captain Michel. And Zinzin re-echoed, "Yeah, he trims up like that over at the 'Black Lion'."

QUITE a time passed and he didn't come around. Finally he showed up with a young man of about twenty who really did sail the seas and no mistaking it. But he didn't think it was anything to boast about; he was as pale as a girl, and he admitted quite frankly that he'd never yet made a trip without being seasick. "He's my adopted son, young Vincent Vincent, a real sailor," John-Joseph told his friends, proudly.

Every time Vincent Vincent's ship docked at Toulon, John-Joseph was so happy about it that it wasn't unusual to see him come into the café rolling and pitching more than ever; three sheets in the wind, no less! He had probably drunk as much liquor as any three dozen hearty sailors could hold.

"For the love o' God," said that devil of a Chaulieu, "where've you been, John-Joseph, to get such a load on?"

"Just come from seeing the boy off from Marseilles," answered John-Joseph in a very sentimental tone, as he began to blubber.

"Well, if you feel so bad about it and it's no fun for the boy," suggested Captain Michel, "there are plenty of other jobs he could take."

"No, he couldn't," replied John-Joseph emphatically, as he gulped down another glassful.

Not one of the company contradicted him; they all agreed with him on that point at least.

"And then," he added, "I don't want to have the day come when they'll take it out on him, poor lad, as they tried to do out of his adopted father."

At this point he began to cry, and he sobbed as can only very drunken men when great sorrows overwhelm them.

"Come on, now, tell us the truth," asked Bagatelle, his sexual imagination always alert; "are you really that boy's father?"

"No," John-Joseph answered bluntly, tears streaming down his cheeks. "No, I'm not his father. . . . His father was murdered!"

"The poor boy," said Zinzin, just to say something.

"Yes, the poor boy . . . because I was just going to tell you, his mother . . ."

"What's that? His mother?" Bagatelle pricked up his ears.

"Well, his mother, she was murdered too!"

"Oh, for the love o' God!" exclaimed Bagatelle.

"That," said Zinzin, "that's a horrible story."

"More horrible than any I've heard you fellows tell," stuttered John-Joseph between his hiccups.

"Well, you've got to show us," said Captain Dorat; "for, after all, one of the reasons we come here every day is to listen to tales of horror."

"It isn't more terrible than what happened to Captain Michel," declared Zinzin.

"I say it is—only you mustn't tell it to anyone. It's a secret," puffed out John-Joseph, trying to swallow a second hiccup.

"Stop your sniffling," commanded Michel, "and tell us all about it. You'll feel better when it's out of your system."

"Not to mention that that happens every day," said Chaulieu rather scornfully, "to have your father and mother murdered—I don't see anything very terrible about that. Who murdered them?"

John-Joseph wiped his eyes with his big red bandanna handkerchief and hiccuped: "Wasn't any murderers."

"How can that be? They were murdered but nobody murdered them?"

"That's just what's so terrible," sighed John-Joseph. "The poor wretches were found stabbed with a kitchen knife—a real butchery. The old man's blood was dripping all over the carpet and the knife was still sticking in the old woman's heart."

"So they'd been fighting?"

"Fighting!" flared up John-Joseph, looking round at the company. "Those two good people? Easy to see you never knew them. They were the kind of married folks who never spoke a cross word to each other in their lives, and they weren't going to begin on that day, I'll have you know. I'm the only one that can give my word of honor to that too. No, they were murdered after there'd been a robbery."

"Now then, why did you first say there weren't any murderers when it was the thieves that murdered them?"

"Wasn't any thieves," John-Joseph cut off short.

"Good God," said Chaulieu.

"Oh, let him go to hell," grunted Dorat.

"Give him a chance to tell his own story," ordered Captain Michel.

"I've got no more to say," declared John-Joseph.

This time all five burst into shouts of laughter. Seeing which, John-Joseph became raging angry. Now he really wanted to tell his story and as the others kept on making fun of him he thumped so hard on the table that he scattered the stacked-up saucers right and left and bellowed, "I swear that in a few minutes you won't be making fun."

"All right, then, come on now, we're all listening."

JOHN-JOSEPH began: "At that time, my home port was Germain—Pilon Street——"

"Paris-on-the-sea," teased Chaulieu.

"Damn it all, I'll not say another word until that big pig gets to hell out of here."

"Don't worry, John-Joseph, you couldn't hire me to stay," answered Chaulieu. "I'm going to take a turn about," and he rose. " 'The horrible murder in Germain—Pilon Street' . . . very little of that goes a long way with me. I'd rather spend my time looking at the pretty women on the screen over at the Palace."

When he had gone, John-Joseph began:

"I don't know if any of you fellows know Germain—Pilon Street. It climbs from the avenue up to the top of Montmartre. It's a lonely neighborhood—not always many people about. But the street is respectable enough. There's where I came to know the Vincent family. They were what you call 'comfortably off' and their friends were even rather surprized to see them keep on living in a section thought rather dangerous; but they said that in the fifteen years they had lived there nothing had ever happened to them and they'd rather live in a little house with a back yard and a garden all to themselves than in a big apartment house where you had to knock against all the other tenants every time you turned around.

"I was their neighbor, and although they weren't very sociable, we got acquainted through the little baby. He was a sweetheart of a child and I spoiled him every time I could . . . I've always adored children. . . . One Christmas night——"

"Hell, one of those Christmas stories!" groaned Zinzin. "Well, see you later, boys."

And he went out to join Chaulieu.

"Got anything 'about a woman in your Christmas story?" Bagatelle asked.

"Yes."

"Good—go on then."

"One Christmas night, Madame Vincent, in her felt slippers, came downstairs to the dining-room where her husband sat toasting his feet at the fireplace waiting for her.

" 'Is the baby sleeping?' Monsieur Vincent asked.

" 'Like an angel,' answered the good woman.

"They adored that child born after they had been married many years. His arrival so late in their lives filled them with an almost supernatural joy. Madame Vincent was forty-five when this happiness came to her, and her husband fifty-five. One sees miracles like that every once in a while.

"Theirs was a perfect marriage; up to this time they had lived just for each other. From now on they lived only for that little child. They baptized him Vincent, and as their family name was also Vincent, the neighbors used to say when they saw the baby go by in his mother's arms:

" 'There he is, the darling; there's little Vincent Vincent and his mama going for a turn on the avenue.' "

"And I too," declared Captain Dorat, as he rose to leave.

Bagatelle tried to dissuade him.

"Wait a minute until he gets to the part about the woman," he said to Dorat.

"Ah, to hell with his story—John-Joseph's a bore. He's not even drunk any more now."

"John-Joseph, give me your word of honor that the part about the woman is worth waiting for," demanded Bagatelle.

"I swear," John-Joseph declared, "that it's impossible to find anything more horrible."

"And is there any love in your story?"

"Is there?—love even unto death. But if you're sensitive you'd better go now; for such a death—well, you don't see them often in love stories."

"I stay," Bagatelle decided. But Dorat had already left to join the other two.

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THE memory of little Vincent Vincent's happy babyhood completely sobered John-Joseph. He even forgot to keep his old clay pipe lighted. From now on he told his story in the style of the former model employee.

"I don't need to tell you how Papa and Mama Vincent allowed themselves to spoil their baby in a thousand loving ways—cakes, candies, toys, ice-creams, little suits of velvet and lace. They were his adoring slaves—nothing was too beautiful, nothing cost too much for little Vincent.

"The couple had been employed in the well-known shop, 'Smart Styles,' ever since that house had been established, and at the time of their baby's coming they were earning, with their bonuses and all, on an average of 20,000 francs a year, which permitted them to lay by a nice little nest egg.

"After Vincent's birth, although they never thought twice about spending right and left for him, they began to deprive themselves of all the little indulgences that had up to now made their married life so sweet. They counted every penny; little by little they became even miserly. No more anniversary dinners; no more visits to the theater; no more Sunday excursions into the country; no more pleasant evening parties, playing games with their friends. All that would be so much put away for the little angel who would find it when he needed it.

"After he had prayed the Infant Jesus to put a beautiful present in the little shoes he had set purposely in front of the dining-room fireplace, little Vincent had fallen off to sleep on this Christmas night, knowing his parents were to wake him up later to see the lighted Christmas tree.

"The sight of those little shoes on the hearth must have been very touching, for Mama Vincent noticed that when Papa Vincent saw them there his eyes filled with tears. She went up to him and patted him on the shoulder.

" 'Come now, Papa Vincent, you're not going to cry on Christmas night, I hope.'

"He got up from his chair. 'I can't help it,' he stammered. 'I've never been able to look at those little baby shoes showing where his little toes have been, without a lump in my throat. I know it's silly. Forgive me, my dear wife.'

" 'Do I forgive you?' and as she said it, she drew him to her bosom and kissed him with all the tenderness of a first kiss. Then when she felt herself also yielding to emotion she straightened up, wiped away a tear with the back of her hand and said:

" 'Come now, Papa Vincent, lend a hand. We're going to trim the Christmas tree.'

" 'So we are. Let's make it gay and beautiful for him, all pink and shining when he opens his eyes on it, the little dear.' "

Bagatelle burst forth with, "For the love o' God, you don't forget anything, do you? But how do you know they did all that? You weren't there, were you?"

"Papa Vincent told me all these little things, understand?"

"No," insisted Bagatelle. "I don't understand, if it's the night he was murdered."

"It's the very night," and John-Joseph's voice was getting more and more dismal.

"Well then?"

"Well, he told me after he'd been murdered."

"You're pretty slick, you always put us in the wrong. But for God's sake, get on to the part about the woman. Afterward, we will see."

"All right; listen then," began John-Joseph.

"EVERY year since the coming of the baby, they had set up a Christmas tree after supper in the dining-room and trimmed it with all the toys and all the little gifts they had bought. When they finished trimming, they used to go out for a walk, and drop into church for the midnight mass. Then they would come back home, light the pink candles, go upstairs

to the baby whom the maid had been watching, lift him up gently and wake him up only when they stood right in front of the tree all dressed with glittering tinsels and stars to make the child happy. They did the very same thing this year as ever.

"That night, there was a traveling fair set up on the avenue; tents had been put up along the pavement and in the empty lots. It was a fine mild evening; winter had hardly set in, and the men and women drinking their beer in the open air in front of the cafés lingered to look at the dancers and listen to the catchy tunes of the merry-go-rounds and hurdy-gurdies."

"Did Papa Vincent tell you all this after he'd been murdered?"

"Yes, everything."

"He must have had an awful thirst!"

"I gave him something to drink," said John-Joseph, "and then he drew his last breath——"

"Before he had proposed another round of drinks?"

"No, but after he had entrusted his little son to me."

"But what about that woman, for God's sake?"

"I'm coming to her."

Calm now, John-Joseph took up the thread of his story.

"Madame and Mônsieur Vincent went up to Place Blanche, where they met some very old friends, the Duponts, who wanted to stop for a little chat. But after the barest how-do-you-do, the Vincents left the Duponts and walked rapidly down to the Church of the Holy Trinity, where they intended to listen to the midnight mass."

It was now Captain Michel's turn to get up.

"Where you going?" Bagatelle asked him.

"My religious scruples," the captain explained good-naturedly, "keep me from going to Holy Trinity for the midnight mass. You must excuse me, John-Joseph. I belong to the reformed church."

"Oh, you damned old infidel!" pleaded Bagatelle. "Wait at least till he gets to the part where the woman comes in."

"A damned old infidel," said the captain, mock-seriously, "takes no pleasure whatever in stories about women . . . not even good women," he added, and wished the company good night.

Bagatelle was now the only one left to listen. John-Joseph went right on. Even if his stack of saucers had been his only audience, he would have gone right along. He couldn't stop now; his own story fascinated him. It was the first time he had ever told it and it would probably be the last. He wanted to prove to himself that he too could tell a story of horror.

"After the Vincents left them, the Duponts swore they were ill-bred, declaring they had never been friendly and sociable since the birth of their baby.

"Reaching the church, the Vincents went in, even though they had a whole hour to wait before the services began. They walked right straight up to the cradle and knelt upon the steps before the Infant Jesus lying there in the manger between the ox and the ass.

" 'He looks just like our baby,' whispered Papa Vincent. But his wife paid no attention to him. She was buried so deeply and so passionately in prayer that the lights and the organ and the crowd elbowing past her couldn't make her turn her head. When the mass was over, her husband had to lay his hand gently on her shoulder to bring her back out of that pious stupor. When she turned to look at him, her face was like wax.

" 'Heavens,' he said, 'it's not good for you to pray like that. Come, I'm sure our boy is already awake and watching for us to come back.'

" 'Yes, yes,' she said, 'let's hurry along.'

"And she led him on as though she was really trying to flee something. He had difficulty in keeping up with her. He was all out of breath when they reached the avenue, and he tried to make her slow up a little.

" 'No, not yet,' she said. 'We must get back as quick as ever we can.'

"He thought she was afraid to be out in the streets of that district at such a late hour. As a matter of fact, that corner of Paris had never been more disquieting. The hurdy-gurdies had ceased groaning out their tira-liras. A few melancholy lights trembled down in the deserted avenue, and behind suspicious shadows, pleasure-seeking gentlemen eyed belated girls wandering up and down the streets.

"However, the Vincents did get back home safe and sound. As soon as they were in their dining-room with the lamp lighted, the sight of the bright Christmas tree drove out of their heads all the ugly sight of the streets. From the foot of the staircase, Monsieur Vincent called to the maid, softly, so not to wake up the child, but she didn't answer. Just as he started to go up, Madame Vincent said:

" 'She's dropped off to sleep beside Vincent. Don't disturb her; let's finish arranging everything here.'

"Then, in great excitement, they put the last touches to the tree. They tied some more toys to the branches already weighted down with Punch-and-Judy boxes; they hung some dolls and some mechanical toys and some games they had bought from time to time during the year and laid away for this very moment. Papa Vincent was just getting ready to slip a general and his trumpet into the little shoes on the hearth when Mama Vincent stopped him short and said:

" 'No, no, not in the shoes. Don't put anything in the shoes. I'll take care of them!'

"And she spread a napkin on the table, put some glasses on it, some plates and some little cakes, and brought out a bottle of champagne. Then she lit the little rose candles on the tree. It was a real illumination. You've never seen anything gayer, prettier than that room all trimmed up in red and silver. The only thing lacking to start the party was baby Vincent himself.

" 'I'll go upstairs and wake him up,' said his mother. 'You wait for us down here.'

" 'And the shoes? Are you forgetting the shoes?' asked the father.

" 'No, I'm not forgetting them. It's a surprize; you shall see.'

" 'Good . . . all right.'

"She disappeared for a second into the kitchen and took from a case an object which she hid quickly under the cloak she hadn't taken off since they had come back from the mass.

" 'Ha, ha, I caught you at it, sly one,' laughed Monsieur Vincent. 'Come, let me see the surprize too; show it to me.'

" 'Go along with you; you're more of a child than little Vincent. Go back to the dining-room. I want you to, my dear.'

"It was always his way to do everything she told him to. He went back and sat down again in front of the Christmas tree. As for her, she hurried to the floor above.

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"She ran up the stairs so fast that she had to stop a moment on the landing. Her heart beat so furiously it almost choked her. On her right hand was the half-open door of the room where little Vincent lay sleeping; on the left a closed door leading to their own bedroom. Before this one she stopped, drew a key from her pocket, unlocked the door, closed it behind her and found herself in pitch blackness. Feeling her way along, she came to the fireplace, kicking to right and left the objects she stumbled on. At last

her fingers touched a box of matches; she struck one; she found a candle and lighted up the room.

"Suddenly the flickering light of the candle revealed a terrible disorder. Sheets and mattresses snatched from the bed lay strewn across the floor; night table and center table were turned upside down; toilet objects had been smashed, a mirrored wardrobe completely ransacked, the clothes thrown here, there and everywhere; several window-panes had been shivered into a thousand pieces. Finally she noticed the sticky, black traces of old slippers by whose aid some one had tried to muffle his footsteps—for the room had certainly been the scene of a robbery.

"The candlelight, flickering and leaping in the breeze blowing in through the window, added weird shadows to the fantastic horror of that scene of devastation.

"To leave the warm atmosphere of the Christmas celebration, of the soft enchantment of that room below where everything is prepared for the sweetest and purest of family joys and to wake up suddenly in the midst of that icy fear—wasn't that more than enough to congeal forever the simple heart of good Madame Vincent? In any case, even if that heart did still beat after such a shock, what inexpressible anguish must have seized little Vincent's mother when she thought of her baby alseep only two steps from that tragic spot, devastated as pitiably as though a tornado had raged through it!

"Well, no . . . Madame Vincent, walking so cautiously in the midst of that disorder, the candle in one hand and a knife in the other—a huge kitchen knife quite new, the mysterious object she was hiding under her cloak a little while ago—Madame Vincent showed neither surprize nor fear."

"She knew there had been a robbery and she had kept it from her husband so not to spoil the Christmas party," broke in Bagatelle, who was not at all lacking in common sense.

"But I've already told you there had been no robbery."

"You've gone loony and I'm getting bughouse . . . well, never mind; but what about that woman? What did she have to do with all this business?"

"Everything. She was the one who committed the robbery."

"Good God! My head's cracking open with your damn story. All right . . . go on. When she saw what had happened what did she do, old woman Vincent?"

"She went into little Vincent's room; she woke up the dozing maid; she sent her up to her own room to finish out her night's sleep. Then there was little Vincent who opens his pretty blue eyes in his mother's arms. He doesn't cry. He knows it's Christmas. He's been dreaming about it. He wakes up with the idea of all the gifts waiting for him downstairs. He claps his little hands together and gurgles, 'Christmas, Christmas,' and the kisses he bites from his mama's cheeks taste as sweet to him as though they were chocolate nougats.

"The little angel is as happy as he can be. He stretches out his arms toward the sparkling Christmas tree. He wants to touch everything, take everything in his hands, play with everything at the same time. His papa and mama can hardly keep him satisfied.

"Then all of a sudden his merry eyes fall on his little shoes on the hearth. He sees they are empty. He begins to cry.

"Papa Vincent looks reproachfully at Mama Vincent. 'Why did you make him unhappy?' he asks. But Mama takes her little one in her arms; she consoles him, cuddles him, dries his tears.

" 'Little Jesus didn't want to bring everything to you tonight. Little Jesus will come again tomorrow morning. Tomor-

row morning there will be some beautiful presents in little Vincent's shoes.'

" 'Will there truly, Mama?'

" 'I promise you there will be, my darling baby.'

"His mother's words bring smiles of joy back to Vincent's eyes again.

" 'But what surprize are you keeping back from him?' asked the father in a low voice.

" 'You shall see, you shall see,' Mama answers with an air of mystery.

"And Mama Vincent takes her good husband's head, draws it down to the baby's and covers both of them with big, passionate kisses and silent tears. This demonstration, so unexpected and somewhat nervous, makes Papa Vincent a little anxious.

" 'You frighten me,' he whispers to his wife.

" 'Let's eat some supper,' she answers.

"And they sit down quietly to their supper and she pours out the champagne and the child is allowed to dip his lips in the foam. Then, his arms still grasping the toys, he dozes off to sleep again on his father's knee.

" 'Carry him back up to his little crib,' says Mama. 'Stay with him a few minutes to be sure he drops back to sleep. I'll go and put out the candles on the tree and then I'll come up to bed."

PAPA VINCENT does as she tells him. Mama Vincent blows out all the candles quickly. Now all is dark where a few minutes before the Christmas tree was glittering and pink. By the feeble rays of the light coming from Vincent's room, she climbs the stairs. Her legs tremble under the weight of her body and she holds onto the banister as though she were afraid she would fall backward. She sighs with relief when she reaches the landing.

" 'What's the matter with you?' her husband asks in a low voice from the boy's bedroom.

"But Mama Vincent doesn't answer. She is too weak to speak. She turns her eyes away from her son's crib. She pushes open the door of the ransacked room. She plows through the disorder; she lights a candle. Once again her eyes take in the sickening horror of it all.

"She grasps the knife—the big, new, shiny kitchen knife, so finely sharpened—and she places herself behind the door.

"Her husband calls out to her from the other room; he gets no answer.

"He appears, his broad chest well lighted by the reddish light of the sputtering candle flame. He asks: 'Why don't you answer, my de——'

"But he is not able to finish the word.

"Mama Vincent stretched forth her arm and struck two terrible blows. The man uttered a shriek and fell down. But she threw herself upon him and covered his mouth with her hand.

" 'Be quiet . . . don't speak.' "

" 'Ah, it's you,' he said through his struggling breath. 'It's you.'

" 'Yes, it is I. Don't speak.'

"Between two snatches of breath the man has strength enough to say: 'At least, shut—the door.'

"She drags herself to the door, closes it again and comes back to the big, bleeding body which she now stares at with eyes full of tears and terror.

" 'My dear, my dear wife,' sighs the wretched man, 'you did right. But are you sure everything is well thought out? Will there be any suspicions?'

"No, no, no one will suspect anything.' And she stretched herself out beside him and pressed her lips upon her victim's.

" 'Do you forgive me?'

" 'Of course I forgive you. You had—more courage than I had.'

" 'Don't say that. But if I had let you do it you would have killed yourself and

they would have known that you were a suicide. I made believe a robbery.'

" 'You did right—yes—it was complete ruin—worse than I told you night before last. The business utterly wiped out . . . not a penny left . . . manager fled . . . all the employees' savings squandered. You have done just right, my dear wife.'

"He closed his eyes and said nothing more. She thought he was dead. Carefully she drew the knife out of the horrible wound. Then his eyelids moved once more.

" 'What are you doing?' he asked with one breath.

" 'Nothing.'

" 'Don't touch it,' he said again, 'don't touch the knife.'

" 'Be quiet, my dear. They would, you understand, ask me some questions. I must not be—able to answer. They must think we've been murdered—both of us . . . you understand? Vincent—if possible, don't die before I do—wait, wait. Here, let me have your hand—help me—do that little thing for me—help me—Vincent. There—like that—strong—ah! ah!'

"Helped by Vincent's hand, she buried the knife in her heart—deliberately—steadily—and as she died she whispered: 'My little boy, Vincent, one hundred thousand francs in—your little shoes.' "

John-Joseph ceased. Bagatelle looked at him more stunned than terror-struck. "How's that?" he said; "what did she mean, one hundred thousand francs in the little shoes?"

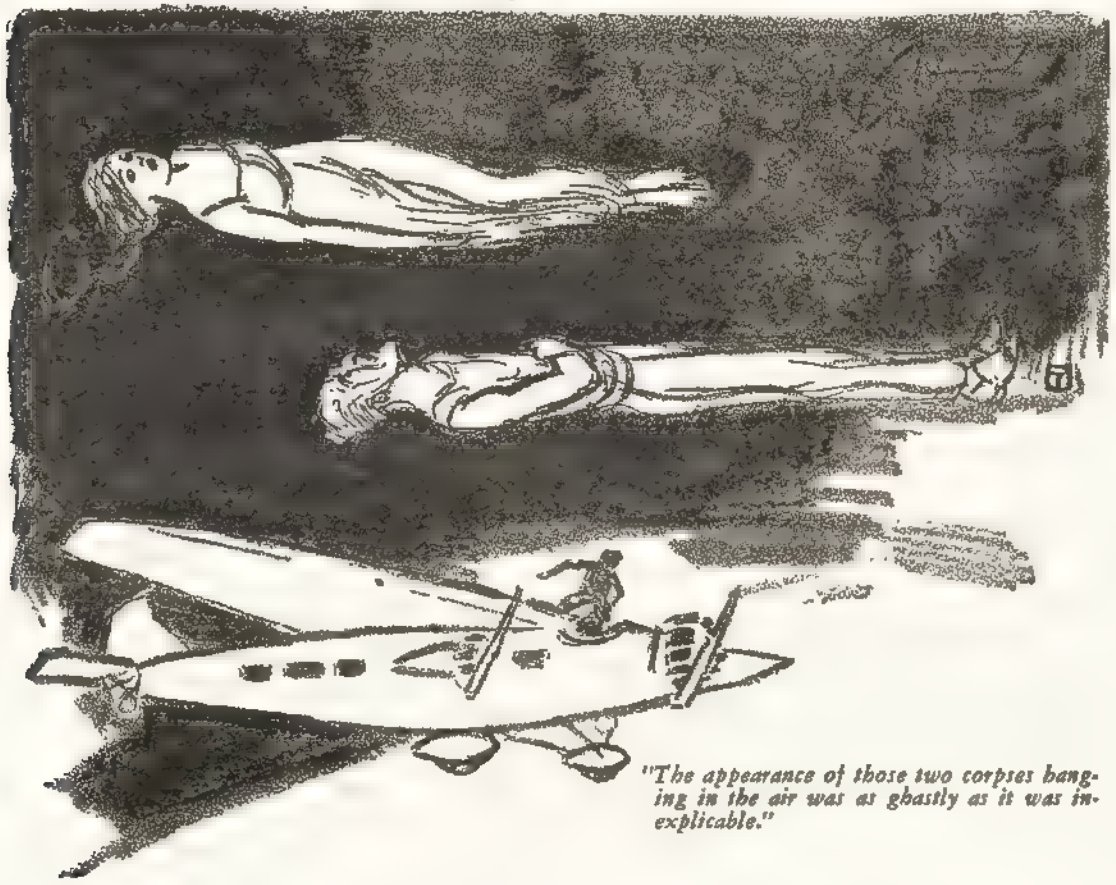
John-Joseph began to blubber again. "Father Vincent didn't die till the next day. He had time to explain to me that he would not have been able to pay the premium on the life insurance he had taken out in favor of his little son. They were both too old to take up some new kind of work. In this way they were sure that little Vincent would never want for anything."

Bagatelle didn't feel like joking any more. "So then, the woman in the story, she's Mama Vincent?"

"Exactly," replied John-Joseph. "Have you ever seen a couple who loved each other like that?"

"Oh, pooh," answered Bagatelle, shaking his head. "It's a damn good love story—I won't say no to that—but nobody would ever say there was anything very horrible about it."

Something From Above by DONALD WANDREI



"The appearance of those two corpses hanging in the air was as ghastly as it was inexplicable."

1. The Red Snow

IN THEMSELVES, the events had all the horror of a nightmare, but a nightmare can be explained so that it ceases to oppress one's mind. The incidents at Norton in western Minnesota were different, for now they may never be completely explained. It is not so much the things we know that terrify us as it is the things we do not know, the things that break all known laws and rules, the things that come upon us unaware and shatter the pleasant dream of our little world. The occurrence at Norton was of such a kind, a horror of so appalling and incredible a nature that no one concerned will ever be able to forget the day of madness.

Everything that might have any bearing on the explanation is included in the following narrative in order that the truth may not be overlooked through omission. It may be that some facts have not yet come to light, and perhaps there have been included a few details that do not really pertain to the affair. The incidents themselves may not be in the right order. If further information should be possessed by any one, the narrative will gladly be corrected, for anything that may help to explain will be eagerly welcomed by scientists and public alike. We walk in

darkness with phantoms and specters we know not of, and our little world plunges blindly through abysses toward a goal of which we have no conception. That thought itself is a blow at our beliefs and comprehension. We used to content ourselves by thinking we knew all about our world, at least; but now it is different, and we wonder if we really know anything, or if there can be safety and peace anywhere in the wide universe.

The phenomena with which we are here concerned began with the blotting out of the stars, an astronomical riddle which was observed by three watchers: Professor Grill of Harvard; his assistant, Mr. Thorndyke; and an amateur astronomer in California, Mr. Nelson. An odd feature of the observation is that the two Easterners swear the blotting out occurred far down on the western horizon, whereas Mr. Nelson reported that it took place near Saturn. Are we to believe that one observation was inaccurate, or that there actually were two simultaneous phenomena in different parts of the heavens? In the light of former and after events, the latter conclusion seems more likely. Furthermore, Mr. Nelson's observation, made on the night of March 28, is apparently connected with one he had made on the preceding night. According to a note he had sent in to the Mount Wilson Observatory, he had been idly examining the planet Saturn on the night of March 27. The atmosphere was exceptionally clear, the observation perfect. The rings were so plain and the planet so impressive in its peculiar way that he stayed on watching it minute after minute. Thus it was that the unexpected happened even while he watched. Shortly after one o'clock, there appeared on its surface a spot of such blinding, dazzling radiance that he thought his vision must have been strained and he was merely seeing things. He looked away for a minute; when he resumed his watch at the eyepiece of his telescope, he discovered that where the spot of incandescent brilliance had been was now a dot of blackness. As he watched it in curiosity, he saw it grow lighter and lighter until finally the planet presented its normal appearance. Mr. Nelson might have ignored the matter altogether if he had not had sufficient scientific training to respect the cardinal principle of never overlooking any fact or data. Thus it was that he wrote down his observation and duly sent it in.

The blotting out of the stars on the night of March 28 was an even stranger phenomenon. In the act of training his telescope on Saturn again to look for a reappearance of the radiant spot, Mr. Nelson noticed a star suddenly flicker out and return, another vanish and shine bright again an instant later. He thought at first that he must be the victim of an optical illusion, but he kept on observing, and saw that the stars which disappeared and shone again were in a straight line which he computed to lie in the general path between Saturn and the Earth. It was a curious spectacle to watch, according to Nelson. It was just as if you were strolling down a street at noon, and stopped to look at a diamond on a black plush cushion in a jeweller's window; and then all at once the diamond wasn't there, even while you were looking at it; and then suddenly there was the diamond again, sparkling as ever. It was not as if a solid body had come between you and the diamond, but rather as if something invisible had crossed your field of vision, something you could not see but which intercepted light-rays. The observation of the two Harvard astronomers duplicated Nelson's, but they said that the blotting out took place down on the western horizon, far away from Saturn. Odder still is their statement that the stars vanished in a straight line that progressed in the general direction of the Earth.

No wide attention was paid to these unusual observations, and even the three watchers did not have much more than idle curiosity. For that reason, because every one was unprepared, the terror at Norton stalked out of night like a hideous dream, as overwhelming as madness itself. Perhaps the rest of the story should be told through the eyes of Lars Loberg, a stolid Norwegian farmer living some three miles from Norton, for it was around his farm that the terror centered, and he himself was a first-hand witness until he went insane and committed suicide.

HE AROSE early as usual on the morning of March 30. It was cold in the farmhouse and he stepped outside to chop an armful of kindling wood. It was already light and snow was falling when he opened the door. He started to go through, then stopped just beyond the threshold and looked around with a blank, puzzled expression on his face. He carefully retraced his steps to the room he had just left, and stood there, looking across the farmyard and open fields.

"Helga!" he called in a curious tone to his wife. "Come here!"

His wife came, and the two stood in the doorway looking at a sight such as they had never before seen. The whole air seemed to be oozing blood. Not a breath of wind was stirring, not a cloud hung in the sky, but a fine mist was falling, a substance that was neither snow nor dust nor blood but that had something of the nature of all three. The snowdrifts around the farmhouse that were not yet fully melted in the spring thaws were already covered with a mantle of brownish-red, and minute by minute, as the strange stuff kept falling from the sky, the layer on the ground grew thicker. The two of them stood there in the quiet of dawn with awe and a little fear, looking at the unusual downfall and a world that was bloody-red. There was a queer odor in the air, almost a stench. It reminded Lars of a two-days-dead cat he once stumbled on, and of a pig he had bled to death recently.

Lars stretched his arm out and caught some of the falling stuff in his hand.

"See!" he said simply to Helga. The stuff melted. It did not run off like water. It stayed in little oily globules of a color like old blood. Instead of having the fresh, earthy smell of snow or rain, it gave off an unpleasant odor that offensively suggested something dead.

Helga was superstitious. She shivered and drew back from Lars's outstretched palm. "Red snow!" she said uneasily. "It—it ain't natural—I don't like it. Oh Lars, shut the door!"

Lars looked out somberly for a minute. "Yeah—red snow. Maybe it means a bad year for the crops." Then he shrugged his shoulders and half smiled at Helga. "But it's probably only dust in the air that got mixed up with the snow. Nothing to get scared about, and——"

"Listen!" broke in Helga sharply.

Lars left unfinished what he had started to say. Up to the house from the pig-sty drifted an uproar of grunting and mad squealing such as he had never heard. In the barn, the horses were neighing and whinnying shrilly, and he heard the wild clatter of trampling hooves. Above the racket of the frightened animals he heard the mournful, whimpering howl of Jerry, the Scotch collie.

Lars tore out of the house on a run. "You stay here!" he shouted back as Helga started to follow him. "I'll see what's after 'em and quiet 'em down!"

The red snow was still falling. Lars raced to the barn first, but there were no tracks of any intruder around it in the new-fallen snow, nor could he find any evidence that man or beast had been prowling around the pig-pen. Lars ran back to the barn, slid open the doors, and

did his best to quiet the plunging horses. Something had badly scared them, but he had little time to speculate on what it was. For the first time in his life, the animals paid hardly any attention to his efforts to calm them, and Lars became more puzzled and bewildered every moment. Then he heard Jerry howling nearer, the patter of racing feet came across the yard, and the dog leaped through the open door, shaking itself and tumbling around at his feet.

"There, Jerry, there, Jerry," Lars crooned, bending over to pat the dog. His hand came away wet with the snow, and then it struck him that the animals were afraid of the weird downfall.

There was nothing much he could do till the snow stopped, so he walked around among them talking to them and patting them until they became a little more quiet. About seven o'clock, the snow ceased falling. The horses were still nervous, but gradually ended their crazy bucking and whinnying. Lars decided it was safe to leave them now, and walked back to the farmhouse, mopping his brow.

2. *The Thing in the Field*

OVER bacon and eggs and steaming coffee, Lars and Helga discussed the phenomenon, but with these homely breakfast items before them and a warm feeling inside, the strange snow became less mysterious and alarming to them.

"No wonder the pigs and hosses was scared!" said Lars, half in jest. "I guess anybody'd feel funny to see red snow instead of white. But it ain't anything to worry about. It's probably just dust in the air like I said."

"Maybe so," Helga answered doubtfully. "But where's there any red dust around here?"

The question stumped Lars. He knew Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, and Nebraska, but in none of those states was there anything with the peculiar color of the snow.

"I wish you'd stay around here today," Helga kept on slowly. "I don't feel right somehow. Things ain't natural like they ought to be."

"No need to worry," Lars answered briefly. "Everything's all right."

As if in mockery of his words, the whole house shook, the coffee slopped across the table, and a terrific crash burst on their ears from near by.

Without a word Lars made another run for the door. Helga, with superstitious fear clutching heavy at her heart, stayed behind to straighten out the table. Some intuition warned her that something was wrong with the world. The red snow, and now this explosive crash—what could they mean? She heard Lars and Jerry walking around the farmhouse as they searched for the cause of the disturbance, but when Lars re-entered the house ten minutes later, the frown on his face showed the futility of his search.

"What was it?" Helga asked.

"Nothing that I could find," he replied, puzzled and irritated. "Sounded like a tree or something fell on the barn, but there wasn't anything the matter. I guess maybe we're hearing things that ain't."

It was poor comfort. The two finished their breakfast in silence. At the conclusion of the meal, Lars said briefly, "I'm going up to the forty-acres to see how the ground's coming along. If you want me, shout and I'll hear you." Helga made no answer in spite of her fears—she knew the futility of arguing with Lars.

Her husband called Jerry and the two set off. The sun was up and the sky fairly clear. It was rapidly getting warmer. The red snow already looked soggy and the air had a bad smell, malodorous and stale.

A path led from the rear of the farmhouse down past the chicken coops and

barn, cut across the hog-run, then ran across an open field and finally up a small hill, on the other side of which lay the forty-acres, a tract used for wheat. Lars walked down the path past the barn and across the hog-run. As they started across the open field, Jerry suddenly bristled. Lars heard him growl savagely. He looked around, but nothing unusual was in sight.

"C'mon, Jerry," he called and walked on. The dog lagged behind him, growling and whining. Then Lars stopped abruptly in surprize. Some ten yards ahead of him was a great gash in the wet earth. It must have been freshly made, for the earth bulged around its edges, and there was as yet no pool of water in it.

As Lars continued striding toward it after his momentary pause, Jerry set up a furious barking that ended in a long, whining howl, and refused to advance. "Stop that fool barking and come along." Lars swore irritably. His nerves were becoming frayed. But the collie absolutely would not come, and Lars went on, thinking that the dog would follow him if he took the lead.

He was a few feet from the edge of the gash when something he had not seen caught his ankle and he tripped forward. In one mad second of horror, the pit of hell seemed to open up before him. Something else he could not see hit him a great blow on his forehead, and his outstretched arms were bruised on a hard substance. *He was leaning forward at a forty-five degree angle over the deep gash.* He looked straight down, and saw its bottom a dozen feet below him, but he did not fall. He might have been resting on a steel platform, but there was absolutely nothing in sight.

A great bubbling of sweat broke out on him. The blood from the bruise on his forehead dripped down, but hung suspended in midair a few inches from his face. His eyes glazed with terror, Lars slowly pushed himself upright and stood trembling a moment. He put out his hand again, and his fingers felt the same stuff, hard as steel, colder than ice, with knobs here and there and strange grooves. There was one depression on the solid surface into which he put his fist, and the hand vanished from sight.

At that, sheer fright gripped him and he turned and ran with all his strength while Jerry whined along at his heels. The terrific crash remained a mystery no longer —would to God that it had! Something that never was of this earth had fallen in the midst of an open field, whether by accident or purpose. All the old folk-lore and witch legends of his race surged into his thoughts to increase his panic. But he thought of Helga too as he ran, and decided that he would say nothing which might alarm her more.

He stopped for a minute outside the farmhouse to get his breath. Then he walked in, trying to be his usual self.

"That you, Lars?" Helga called out. A moment later she entered the kitchen. When she saw him, she ran forward. "Why, Lars, your face is bleeding!"

"Yes, I—I tripped and fell."

Helga looked into his eyes that were yet wild and dilated, and the truth of intuition leaped into her heart.

"Lars! That crash—you know what it was! There was something in the field!"

"No," he answered deliberately, "no, there was nothing in the field."

3. *The Falling That Was Upward*

IT WAS a solemn pair that sat down at midday for lunch. The oppressive weight of mystery and fear hung over the table, and stopped even the small talk that Lars and Helga ordinarily indulged in. By tacit consent, they said nothing further about the incidents of the morning.

Toward two o'clock, the sky began to cloud up, and it grew cooler outside; but the red snow had all melted in the warmth of the late morning, and around the farmhouse hung a putrid smell, stale and nauseating, the odor of a charnel-house or the grave.

Lars puttered around the kitchen and basement, doing odd jobs to pass time. He did not leave the house. His nerves were on the ragged edge, and he did not know what might happen next. The red snow and the thing in the field lay heavy on his heart. Nature had gone all wrong this day, the security and trust of a lifetime had vanished in a brief hour. What could he do in the presence of a mystery that seemed to have no explanation, and things that went against the laws of life he had relied on? As the great masses of leaden clouds piled up overhead, and gusts of chill wind whined around the yard and the house, the indefinable fear of the unknown hung over his thoughts. He had only one ray of hope: that the paper which the rural postman would leave in the afternoon would give some explanation of the mysterious snowfall. The thing in the field he vainly tried to put out of mind by pretending that it must be a new kind of comet.

It was about four o'clock when Lars, who was upstairs fixing a broken window-sash, heard the postman's whistle. He put down his hammer and nails, then walked down a short passage to the head of the stairs. From there, looking across the front bedroom and out its window, he could see the mail-box on its post where the county road ran by some ninety or a hundred yards in front of the house. There the familiar horse and buggy of the postman were halted. To his surprize, Helga with the mail in her hand was standing there too, talking with him but evidently on the point of returning to the house. She must have seen him coming down the road and gone out to meet him.

The sight of Helga made him curiously uneasy. He wished she had waited to let him go after the mail. As he started to descend the flight of steps, he decided he would ask her to stay inside for the next day or so. But all thoughts were driven from his head and black terror overwhelmed him in a sickening rush when he was half-way down.

For there came to his ears a sound that was yet many sounds. There was a strange, long zing-g-g, the mad whinny of a horse, and the sudden, piercing shriek of a woman. And then there came again that long, strange zing-g-g, and the noise of a great wind.

Lars cleared the rest of the steps in one leap and stumbled on a twisted ankle around the corner and to the front door and so outside. The blind fear which he had felt as he hung over the pit that morning suspended by a thing which he could not see was as nothing to the surge of horror that swept upon him now.

For there was no one in sight. The mail-box was deserted. The road stretched away to the left, bare of any human traveller for three-quarters of a mile, and to the right, just as empty for a half-mile. And in the field that stretched away on the other side of the road, not a living creature was to be seen. Helga and the postman with his horse and buggy had vanished as though they had never been.

But there was a curious thing: all around was gray from the clouds that obscured the sky, except in a round patch of blue perhaps a hundred yards in diameter through which sunlight was pouring above the mail-box. Lars mechanically looked up. High above was the single rift in the cloud-banks, a rift that the surging clouds were rapidly filling again. Even as he looked, some white things fluttered toward earth—letters and papers. Lars

picked up a handful like one dazed or mad and stumbled back into the house. He was hardly conscious of the sudden roar of wind that came up, or the wall of sleet that drove in a wild slant from the clouds. In the same mechanical, irresponsible way, he turned again and went out into the half-darkness with the hopeless hope that his eyes and ears had played him a trick. He walked down the road in either direction, searched across the field, called and shouted till his voice was hoarse, but not a thing did he find, and no one answered his vain cries. Then at last when the sleet turned to a fine drizzle which ceased shortly, he went back to the farmhouse, still in that numbing daze.

The letters were lying on the floor where he had dropped them, and he automatically picked out of them the paper that he had thought might contain a news item of explanation. But he could not concentrate his thoughts, and they were only disjointed phrases that his eye picked out here and there. "Red snow falls—volcanic dust in upper atmosphere—dust clouds from western prairies—curious unknown organism puzzles scientists—chemist asserts he found traces of a substance like blood——" were the paragraph's explanations and comment that ran in a jumble through his thoughts; and somewhere else on the page, a few other phrases: "Strange display of Northern Lights—beams of red, green, violet, yellow—phenomenon observed over Norton—university astronomer offers no explanation——"

4. *Something from Above*

BY NIGHTFALL of that day of madness, it was again partly clear outside. In the east still hung a low bank of clouds, but overhead and to the west, the stars were coming out.

Lars sat by a window looking dully into the night, as he had been sitting for the last three hours. His mind had become calmer while he brooded over mysteries he could not fathom, but there was a light in his eyes that had never been in them before. Only the stolidity of his race had thus far kept him from going mad. In his ears still rang that medley of sounds, and his horrified eyes held before them yet the vacant roadway, and the letters fluttering down. It was incredible, unthinkable; yet all his thoughts wound up with the explanation that was no explanation at all: somehow, the postman and Helga had been whirled up from the surface of earth. He had thought of a tornado, but nothing else had been disturbed and he had seen no telltale whirling in the sky. What was it that could reach down to earth all in a brief second or two and instantly vanish skyward with its prey? The cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Once as a child he had wondered how he would feel if he saw an apple fall from a tree and, instead of dropping to earth, sail toward the heavens. Now he knew that dreadful sensation, the feeling that nature had suddenly gone askew.

He stared again into the sky directly above, where the stars shone bright and cold, vainly hoping that he might draw a solution out of those fathomless deeps. Minutes ticked by. The Milky Way blazed out in its mysterious beauty, and the night was quiet with no wind.

When it was that he became conscious of something new, he could not say. But in back of his futile thoughts, a forgotten phrase groped for expression: Northern Lights—phenomenon—red, green, violet——

Then he knew. High above him, so faintly that at first he could not be sure, beams of many-colored light stabbed and shot and pulsed across the stars. And it struck Lars with surprize and something of a new fear growing upon him that no-

where else was the display to be seen. In the past, he had frequently watched the Aurora Borealis creep down from the north, flaming brighter till streamers and cataracts of weird radiance played across all the northern sky. But he had never before seen it confined to so small a spot in the heavens. These flashing beams of green and violet, red and yellow did not seem as remote as the Northern Lights usually were, and it was strange that they occurred in so small an area, an area which looked no larger than a plate, though he knew it must be immensely larger out there in space. Sometimes only two beams would dance around each other, sometimes all would be gone, then a minute later rays of different colors leaped out against the starry velvet of night. And the strangest part of the display was the clearness and straightness of the beams; there was none of the vagueness and change and slow merging into other patterns and colors that the Aurora had; this resembled more the snapping on and off of giant flashlights.

For several minutes, Lars looked at the queer lights with the dullness of a mind dazed by too many shocks. And even as he watched them, he became aware of something yet newer: he seemed to see one or two black specks in the air between him and the lights, like the dancing specks before the eyes of some one who has been struck on the head; and there came to his ears a rush of wind, and two objects hurtled furiously past him to smash on the ground. A moment later, he thought he heard a thud down by the road and another from somewhere afar, but perhaps they were only echoes that he heard, or his ears may have been playing him tricks. He could not be sure, for he looked at the two in the farmyard and his eyes went wide and glary. Like a run-down automaton he rose and stumbled downstairs out into the chill, quiet night.

There was something oddly familiar in that nearest object, and he went up to it with a far-away buzzing in his ears, and a wild swirl of insane dreams in his mind. He bent over the still form; a scorched odor came to his nostrils, he recognized the poor, broken body of Helga, the hideously white skin, he crooned a word of grief and bent over to stroke the lifeless clay. And then he snatched his hand back again, for it burned like the fire of a furnace, but he knew it was no fire that he touched, nor any heat, but the biting, absolute cold of outer space. As Helga had vanished, in mystery and terror, so had she returned, but the horror for her was over. For him it kept on. The night was all silent, but that maddening buzz was louder in his brain. He shook his head to get rid of it, and his eyes fell upon the other object.

FOR a second that was as long as eternity, time and space and the world stood still for Lars. No eyes could look unchanged on that slimy blob of liquid flesh and fungus and ichor, with its loathly tentacles and beaks, its blackness of corruption, its monstrous mixture of all that was obscene in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and more horrible still, the thing's metallic core like brown quicksilver that still moved feebly with an appalling parody of life; and in its center a sickly, rotten bulb of a dead, blind eye that glared foully at Lars with its dying light.

The buzzing in his ears swelled to a grating, shrill din, something snapped, his teeth champed together, and the madness was upon him. He muttered crooning endearments to Helga, shrieked blasphemies at the slimy thing from above,

burst out into peals of mirthless laughter and rasping sobs. His crazed mind went off on another tangent, and he stopped his muttering and shrieking as suddenly as he had begun; instead, he chuckled with insane cunning as though he had thought of a way to cheat his enemy. He backed slyly to the farmhouse, was gone for a minute, reappeared with a great armful of kindling wood. He returned to fetch another and another, till a heap of it lay on the ground. He made a rude pyre out of it, except for an armful or two; he dragged the body of Helga onto it though his hands burned as if in a white-hot furnace; he ran back, reappeared with a can, poured kerosene on the pyre. He lighted it with tears of madness and grief running down his face. Then fury entered his heart, and he threw the rest of the kindling on the obscene thing, and drenched it with the kerosene. As the flames flared up, he danced around with grief and hatred and insanity alternately writhing across his features. He ran back to the woodshed for more fuel. He was about to return with a load of cordwood when he heard the roar of a small explosion, saw a fountain of sparks and burning wood spew into the air. He stood agape for a second, then ran madly to the fires. The obscene monstrosity was no more—something in it or something it carried had exploded, and in two or three places burning chunks smoldered on the farmhouse roof. But Lars paid no attention to them or to the flames that were beginning to lick at the eaves, for some half-forgotten thing was pounding at the back of his thoughts.

The thing in the field! The thing in the field! The phrase sang through his head like a chant, and he burst out into another wild peal of maniacal laughter. He scarcely looked at the black smoke that surged up from Helga's funeral pyre, or the flames that consumed, as he turned and sped back to the pile of wood. He picked up all he could carry of the three-foot lengths and stumbled down the path, staggering under the weight. When he reached the gash in earth, faintly illuminated by the red glare that began to come from the burning roof of the farmhouse, he tossed his whole armful onto the invisible thing, and shouted madly again as the wood hung suspended in air over the gap. He returned again and again until all the wood was strewn around and over the thing that could not be seen. On his last trip, he brought two one-gallon cans of kerosene and poured them on as much of the wood as was within reach, then tossed them to the top of the pile and lighted the mass. A tongue of fire leaped out and raced over the pile, and a volume of thick black smoke issued up. The field around him was already made bright by a lurid glare from the farmhouse that was now entirely ablaze. Like a necromancer uttering his ritual of incantation and dark sorcery, Lars leaped and danced and howled around the great bonfire he had built. A tower of black smoke from the kerosene mounted almost straight up in the air from the flames, the wood crackled, the heat became scorching and blistering. And under the metamorphosis of fire, Lars saw a last, strange riddle shape itself before his eyes. There were outlines forming, the suggestion of a vast structure imbedded deeply in earth. He gibbered to the stars as he saw planes and angles and cubes that looked like spheres and the geometry of another dimension. His maniacal laughter rang out again as he looked through the glowing, transparent walls and saw objects he could not name, strangely mounted mechanical devices, fantastic articles that no mind on earth could have imagined or shaped. And lying around them were

dozens of those hellish slimy things that were neither animal nor vegetable nor matter, but partook loathsomely of the nature of all three. He shouted in mirthless glee as he glimpsed briefly still other things—weird, gaseous substances on the floor that held their shape as rigidly as dead bodies.

There came a hiss like a great sigh, a rumble of warning, and Lars insanely flung his arms wide apart as if to embrace the cleansing fire. It was his last gesture, for earth and sky and life trembled and were blasted before the titanic explosion that wiped out the thing in the field.

5. A Riddle of the Stars

ON THE afternoon of March 30, shortly after two p. m., Larry Greene took off from the Twin City flying-field with a special consignment of bank dispatches for Seattle. His 'plane was last seen at Elk Forks, twenty miles east of Norton, at approximately four o'clock. When nothing more was seen of him for several hours and no report was received, the importance of his cargo caused a searching-party to be sent out. Early in the morning of March 31, his airplane was found near the burned Loberg farmhouse. It was completely smashed, but the pilot's body was nowhere around. The searching-party continued to scour the area. An hour later, the missing flyer was picked up, wandering in a dazed condition through a field near Norton. His account of what had happened was so singular and fantastic that his sanity was questioned. When, however, he was discovered to be suffering badly from exposure, he was immediately rushed to the Twin Cities for medical attention. All efforts to save his life were unavailing. He died of gangrenous infection several days later. Among his effects were found two significant items: a black object, and the following extraordinary communication, which was apparently written sometime during the first day of his confinement for medical care:

"To others I leave the task of deciding whether I have been the victim of insanity or hallucinations. Already I myself doubt the testimony of my own eyes and ears. If it were not for the disk which I brought with me, I would believe the entire adventure to be a delusion or a dream, but unless the disk proves to be a figment of a deranged imagination, I can not doubt the truth of what I have to say and the reality of what I saw.

"At two-ten p. m. on March 30 I took off from the Twin City flying-field with a bundle of bank dispatches for Seattle. I headed due west. Weather conditions were fair for the first hour and I kept at the relatively low flying level of two thousand feet. At this point, somewhat less than one hundred miles from the Twin Cities, I was nearing a region for which sleet or snow storms were forecast. Cloud-banks were piling up ahead, so I immediately began to climb for altitude. The last town I saw was Elk Forks. After that, the clouds below me obscured everything.

"I had climbed to six thousand feet, then seven thousand five hundred, and was now keeping to an altitude of nine thousand feet. I estimated that I must now be nearing Norton.

"Without a word of warning, the terror came.

"My plane was suddenly enveloped in a greenish light. The motor and propeller droned, but my progress was at a complete standstill. My altimeter showed eleven, thirteen, fifteen thousand feet so rapidly that I could hardly follow it. Nothing I could do had any effect on the

'plane or its incredible rise. The sensation was sickening. I had the motor wide open, but not a foot did we advance. Instead, the 'plane rose straight up like a balloon. I scarcely had time even to adjust my oxygen tank and turn on the current for the air-tight electrically heated suit that I always wear in cold weather flying. The altimeter soared to forty thousand feet, then froze.

"Everything had happened so instantly that I was almost stunned. A few seconds at most could have elapsed between the moment the greenish light came and the altimeter froze.

"Through my suit, I began to feel an intense cold. I had no knowledge of how high I now was, but I knew that if my strange ascent were not quickly halted, I would perish in the absolute or almost absolute zero of the upper atmosphere. The motor now froze and went dead. Instead of falling, the airplane remained in its unnatural suspension, still bathed in green light. The sky above me had become so dark that I was certain I must be near the outer edge of earth's atmospheric blanket. The cold was more piercing than ever.

"At this moment, I thought I heard two faint clicks closely following each other. A few seconds later, they were repeated. The green light disappeared. Overhead, the stars went out. The effect was precisely as if I were looking through an invisible pane of glass but could see nothing. And only a few feet away from my 'plane there had suddenly appeared the bodies of a dead man and a woman. The intense cold rapidly lessened in severity, but had it been a thousand times as icy as it was, it could not have been as numbing as the strange horror of all that had happened to me in a brief minute. I was in the midst of a hellish nightmare infinitely more titanic and brain-shattering than any I had ever had. The terror and fear of nauseating mystery were upon me, I hardly knew whether I was dreaming or awake, alive or already beyond the borderland of death. And those two corpses hanging in the air near me—their appearance was as ghastly as it was inexplicable.

"The whole thing was like a delirious vision. I felt as if I were confined, the terrific cold had ceased, yet there was not a star in the sky above me nor could I see the earth beneath. If it were not for the airplane and the two bodies, I would have believed that I had gone blind.

"I had hardly understood—or rather, realized my situation since I did not understand it at all—when there came to me again a faint click, from above, and I automatically looked up.

"I do not know what I expected to see, except anything or nothing. But it was no answer to any of the thousand questions in my mind that I saw, but mystery darker and deeper. There was cloud vapor a dozen feet above me—or was there? I have never before seen a gaseous substance hold its form and shape rigidly, but I did then, and with a sick, faint feeling, I realized that the cloud-like thing was alive. I had an impression of eyes burning into mine, but there were no eyes visible in it. My brain received a command, but my ears heard no sound. In some way that I could not comprehend, the monstrous living substance above me had put into my thoughts a picture of myself climbing from the cockpit, and ascending.

"Climb from the cockpit of an airplane heaven knows how many miles above earth? It was madness, suicide. I fought with all my strength to retain my seat. But I was powerless, and slowly I climbed over the side into empty space.

I should have fallen, down, down like a dead weight. But I was standing as upright as if solid ground were beneath my feet. Where was the ultimate cold that should be freezing me? Why did I not fall? What was the meaning of all the eery events of the past few minutes? I was trembling violently, hot and cold sweat broke out on me, a deadly fear gnawed at my heart for the first time in my life.

"Then I thought I must have entered some queer, hypnotic state, for a sudden feeling of peace came over me, and in answer to another silent command I mounted what seemed to be a short ladder, and stepped off a moment later to another invisible floor. The gaseous thing retreated as I advanced, and now hung a few yards away from me. But I scarcely noticed it, for my eyes were bewildered by the sight around me, and a dim light of comprehension began to clear away the fog over my thoughts.

"Masses of intricate, gleaming machinery and delicate mechanism were everywhere about me, together with elaborate dials, controls, and other devices whose purpose I could not even conjecture. Around each device and control were grouped scores of the gaseous things. I dreamed for a moment that I was in an airship of some new kind, but there were no enclosing walls and I could see no floor beneath me. Yet the sky was devoid of stars.

"All this I noticed in a brief instant before my captor mutely commanded me to walk forward a few paces and seat myself. Too stunned and overwhelmed to offer any resistance, I did so. The thing drifted toward me and hung a few feet away. I looked at it, and again I had an impression of burning eyes that I could not see. But there came over me again that odd sensation of peace.

"How can I describe the strange terror and fascination of the scene, or what followed? Surely no man was ever before so suddenly jerked from the habits and thoughts of a lifetime as I was then. Without my realizing it until afterward, I must have been placed again under hypnotic or mental control, for the mechanism and gaseous shapes surrounding me suddenly faded away into blankness, and then, while I had the disembodied feeling of one who dreams, a succession of fantastic images and pictures were imposed on my imagination by the thing before me. No word passed between us, for neither could have understood the language of the other. By a kind of mesmeric thought-transference, I was made to understand all that had happened to me, and some things I had not known about, and some of which I shall probably never have any further knowledge to certify their truth.

"As I had begun to suspect, I was now in a space-flyer of utterly new type and construction to me. The being who hung a few yards away was Relelpa, director of an expedition from Saturn on a mission that meant existence or death to the solar system.

"For thousands of years, civilization had been progressing there until the inhabitants were now as far ahead of us as we are ahead of jungle apes. The life force which is persistent everywhere in an infinite variety of organisms produced on Saturn opaque, gaseous substances like Relelpa. Many years before our meeting, these eery inhabitants of Saturn had discovered deep in the bowels of their planet one of the rarest elements in all the universe. Saturn itself contained only a few thousand tons of the ore from which this element, Seggglyn, was extracted.

"Seggglyn resists cold even to absolute zero, but if exposed to sufficient heat it

explodes. Its most curious and most valuable property is its imperviousness to gravitation. For instance, a lump of the pure element isolated under an open sky is immediately hurled skyward by the centrifugal force of the spinning planet, since gravitation has no effect on it. Until it finally breaks up into atomic particles, it hurtles forever through the universe, rebounding anew from any gravitational pull which it may chance to come near.

"In extracting the element and in experimenting with it, the Saturnians not only discovered how to control it but obtained by-products of inestimable value. Seggglyn is completely transparent, but nothing beyond it is visible—as if you looked through a pane of glass but could see nothing beyond. Perhaps I can make this clearer by saying that it is like a blind spot. If you put two black dots on a cardboard, hold the cardboard at arm's length, focus your eyes on one dot, and then draw the cardboard toward you, one of the dots will disappear when the cardboard is about a foot and a half from your eyes. Well, Seggglyn acts like a blind spot at any distance from the eye of the beholder.

"In extracting the element, the Saturnians found that the last impurity removed had the effect of counteracting the element; that is, until the impurity was taken out, Seggglyn was held by gravitational attraction. Thus, by putting the impurity back in, or coating Seggglyn with it, the element had only normal mineral properties.

"There was only a limited amount of the stuff on Saturn, and no trace of it was ever found in the spectrum of any star. What should be done with it? The Saturnians considered every possible use, and finally decided that it would be most valuable as an offense and defense against any danger; and so they built this vast space-flyer, and armed it with all their weapons and rays of destruction. The flyer could not be seen, nor its location guessed unless it crossed a star and shut out the light.

"On the outside of the flyer at one tip were placed dozens of thin plates of the impurity. These were controlled by radio from inside the ship. They could be adjusted to any position on the outside, so that the ship's speed could be regulated, and just enough gravitational pull shut off or turned on to let the ship rise and land safely.

"With their space-flyer, the Saturnians had explored the solar system hundreds of years ago, and had even ventured out into the galaxy beyond, for there was apparently no limit to the speed which it could attain. If its rate of speed were constant when it left the gravitational influence of Saturn, it would keep on going at that rate. But if its speed were controlled so that it was constantly increasing at the point where it passed beyond Saturn's influence, its acceleration would continue at the same rate, and if it were worth the risk, a speed of hundreds or thousands of light-years per second could be reached.

"After their early explorations and experiments, the Saturnians kept the flyer idle, but always in readiness for any danger. They had discovered many disquieting matters on their trips, but so long as nothing happened, they preserved their policy of waiting in readiness.

"And out of night with no warning had suddenly come the one cataclysmic danger that they had not anticipated. From their great central observatory, the Saturnians kept up a constant survey of the heavens for astronomic and protective reasons. One week the observation had shown a normal view of the region of the evening star. And the next week, stars were disappearing momentarily in a

straight line that travelled toward the solar system.

"They could not believe the explanation, but there was only one explanation possible. Some star or world beyond the reach of their farthest telescope had possessed the rare ore, and a space-ship made from Seggglyn, whether a scouting party or an expedition of invaders, was hourly leaping colossal stellar distances toward the solar system. Their surprize turned almost into panic when they discovered that instead of one, there were three space-flyers hurtling onward!

"So short was the warning that desperate measures had to be taken. Hasty calculations showed that the invaders were heading toward Earth first, perhaps to reconnoiter or to use Earth as a ricochet for reaching Saturn. Relelpa was summoned to lead the party. The need of reaching Earth before or not later than the invaders was desperate. It could not be accomplished even with the normal acceleration of the Saturnian space-flyer. In the crisis, at the moment when the nullifying plates were stripped from the outside of the flyer, Saturn's most powerful explosive was used to hurl it off in a blinding flash to give it the initial acceleration required.

"Over Earth, they met; and before the invaders realized that their coming was known, the red annihilation ray of the Saturn flyer stabbed out and the first ship from outside dissolved into brownish dust that drifted down. The red ray stabbed out again but missed; the second ship which used some other means than black plates of using gravitational pull as the first and third also did had dropped suddenly to escape the deadly ray; but the ship behind it had also dived and crashed into the tip of its own comrade, and as the bitter cold of space mowed down its occupants, the second ship hurtled to Earth. Some of its occupants spilled out into space, and from one of these who was instantly caught and swept to the Saturn-flyer by the green magnetic ray, the story of the invaders was found out.

"Where they came from is unknown, for their world lies beyond any galaxy or nebula known to astronomers of the solar system. They too had discovered Seggglyn on their world, and had discovered it at the last moment, for their world was dying and had almost reached its end. With their super-telescopes, they had found traces of Seggglyn in the spectrum of Saturn long before it was isolated on their own world. Time was priceless to these gruesome plant-animal-mineral creatures from the spaces beyond. They had built three ships, but these were not enough to transport all the inhabitants of their world before the end came. If they could obtain the ore from Saturn and build two more ships or even one great flyer, they would be saved.

"And so the three flyers started out, each loaded with a thousand of the loathly creatures. One ship was to land on the most habitable of the planets, Earth, and wipe out all life on it with the violet ray of terrific heat and the yellow ray that blasted anything it touched. The other two were to disgorge on Saturn, and while one band destroyed the inhabitants, the other would extract Seggglyn from the ore and build as many ships as possible. As soon as the three flyers had landed, they were to return to their world, empty except for the crews to man them, in order to bring back other thousands of the loathsome, obscene things.

"And their hellish plan would have succeeded if they had not neglected one possibility: they thought that the Saturnians were unaware of the property of Seggglyn, and that the ore was still unmined; or that in any case, their own three space-flyers would prove to be in-

vincible. And so, all unprepared, in the very moment of their triumph the strength of the invaders was cut down by two-thirds.

"But now the third ship was warned; and all this day the Saturn-flyer had been engaged with it in a struggle on which the fate of worlds depended. If the Saturnians were defeated, Earth and Saturn were doomed, even though the invaders were unable to save all the inhabitants of their own world by transporting them across space.

"Relelpa showed me a great, metallic disk, on which the heavens were mirrored; since those inside the flyer could see nothing outside, television was necessarily employed for guidance. And there, close to the center of the disk which marked our position, I saw stars blotted out where the invaders hung.

"What can I do? Why do you want me? were the two silent questions that I asked Relelpa; and the answer came back, there was nothing I could do up here. Relelpa had sighted my airplane and ordered it picked up by the green ray. He had told me all he wanted to, and I was now about to be released to warn the people of my world in the event that the Saturnians were defeated.

"I had no will-power of my own beside this mental giant, I merely followed his directions. It would have been fatal to try using my airplane at this height, and my parachute would probably have ripped from my shoulders with the force and speed of my fall when it finally opened. Relelpa gave me a curious black disk when he read my thoughts, and again by mental image showed me how to use it.

"Suddenly he flashed me the image that the final, desperate battle was near. At the same instant, he thrust me toward the outer chamber through which I had originally entered. I saw his strange, cloud-like form for the last time, I felt him wish me good luck as I in turn wished him success, and then the door clicked behind me. I held the disk over my head, manipulating it as he had explained, so that parts of the black covering slid off the Seggglyn. I heard another click, and then all at once I dropped, and my airplane twisted past me hurtling downward and after it the bodies of the two people who had been on earth in the path of the green ray when its magnetic power picked me up sped by me, and behind them the hideous monster which the Saturnians had captured.

"As I fell slowly, still feeling as if I had dreamed a horrible nightmare, I looked above me; and my eyes went wide when I saw red and green ray flashing against yellow and violet beam. Surely it was the strangest and most important battle ever witnessed by man! Sometimes all four rays darted and flamed out, sometimes only one or two; or both rays of one flyer would vanish only to reappear suddenly in another spot.

"I heard the wind whistle past me, I looked at earth far below, and a great fear took hold of me; but I was falling no faster than I would be with a parachute, and the mental picture of Relelpa came back to reassure me.

"Once more I looked upward. I saw only the red and the green rays leaping madly across the sky in a pæan of victory —the battle was won! . . .

"The doctor tells me that gangrene has set in. I guess I was more seriously frozen than I thought in those upper spaces. They think I am crazy and they won't believe what I tried to tell them last night. Maybe I am crazy, but I swear that I saw all the things I have written of as plainly as I see now my hospital cot or the skylight above me or the black disk under my pillow. Well, that ought to convince them if nothing else does.

"LARRY GREENE."

6. *The Black Disk*

UNDERNEATH the pillow of the cot on which Larry Greene had died, a small disk was found. The nurse who discovered it looked at it in some curiosity, puzzled as to its purpose and wondering what to do with it. Finally she called the doctor who had vainly tried to save the pilot's life.

"What is it?" he bruskly inquired.

"That's just it, I don't know," she answered. "I found this on Mr. Greene's cot. What shall I do with it?"

The doctor took the object and scrutinized it closely. It was a black disk, slightly oval in shape, and approximately a foot in diameter. It was perfectly flat, with an unvarying thickness of a half-inch. On two sides it was indented, and at each indentation was a row of tiny knobs.

"H'mm," mused the doctor, "I've never seen anything quite like it." He fingered the knobs meditatively.

There was a faint click, and the black covering of the disk somehow seemed to slide off or collapse. And all at once, he found himself with nothing in his hands. He heard a sudden wind, the crash of shattered glass, a sound like the rush of air.

The dumfounded doctor looked at an amazed nurse, as bits of glass from the broken skylight dropped around them. The black disk which they had been examining a few seconds ago had vanished.

A Dream of Bubastis

By HARVEY W. FLINK

I dreamt I stood before a shrine of Bast,
And harkened to the piping of her flutes,
Whilst in the dusk two Ethiopian mutes
Came through the granite gates, and bound me fast.

They laid me on an altar-stone and fled
Like shadows from the hall, and in my dream
I heard above the flutes a wailing scream,
And saw the goddess with the feline head.

I groaned, and in the censer's golden smoke
I watched her lift her black, enormous paws:
She tore my flesh with gleaming agate claws
Until, with sweat upon my brow, I woke . . .
And knew that in the dawn a creature sat
Sphinx-like upon my chest: it was a *cat*.

The PRIMEVAL PIT

by B. WALLIS

"After that, chaos indescribable."

"GREAT snakes! Joe, did you ever see the like of it?" exclaimed Haines, the shorter and stouter built of the two men, hoarsely, as he stared at the two-mile stretch of placid water fully five hundred feet below them.

"It's a slice of luck; and by the look of these walls it's a miracle if we ever get down to it," replied the tall, spare Elkins as he craned his head farther over the edge of the huge wall to obtain a better view of it.

"Well, we got to make it," said Haines, relapsing into his natural slow, stolid manner of speech.

"Sure we'll make it—this blasted wall can't go on forever without a break," growled his partner as his gaze returned longingly to the silvery shimmering surface that lay fully a mile or more distant, yet by reason of their elevation seemingly so close to them.

In all the four days of their crossing the desolate plateau the scarcity of water had been their great trouble. Hardship, heat, cold, hunger—nothing to kick about in those. Not a grumble had escaped them even in the stifling heat of the airless hollows; or the roasting hell of the open where a million facets of glassy rock reflected the molten shafts of a flaming sun that ceaselessly assailed them; or nights when they had shivered in the biting chill, when the rocks crackled and rang in contraction, as the temperature dropped maybe sixty degrees in an hour after sundown, and the plateau sloughed the heat it had bathed in. For fire had been denied them, there being never a twig or a blade of grass in all that immense desolation. So for four days never a morsel of cooked food or hot cheering *maté* had passed their lips, and a little sun-dried meat and uncooked beans were

all they had to sustain them. An occasional trickle of seepage in the depths of a canyon had just held life in them and sustained their determination to reach a spot from which it would again be possible to resume their search for the treasure that had brought them deep into the trackless and totally unknown regions of the northern Andes.

It was just a tale they heard in Paita: told, between gasps and the red froth that stained the pallid lips of the dying derelict, to the two hard-eyed adventurers who had befriended him and eased his last hours of the misery of loneliness and poverty. Just a few faint choking words that had sent them hurrying into the storm-swept savagery of "the Top of the World," as the Peruvians so aptly term the immense range that frowns down on the Pacific shelf, where alone maps are anything but mere waste paper to the traveler in that great wilderness. A tale of wandering in the wilds far to the north; and coming on a tribe of nomadic natives who had offered for sale a dozen or so small rubies, which, they stated, now and again they found inside the migrating waterfowl that broke their passage south by alighting in a small near-by lake the tribe frequented. He had purchased them for the price of a blanket, and later turned them over for the price of a week's spree in a filthy drinking-tavern of a coastal town. But he knew something of such things, and affirmed there was no doubt whatever of their identity and value, and held the natural conclusion that somewhere north of that lake, hidden in the huge hills there lay another stretch of water in whose gravel beaches there might lie a fortune for the lucky discoverer.

So, as though there was only one course open to them, they had come to Pienta Arenas, where he had made the purchase; and from there they had struck fearlessly into the heart of the vast range that towered above this last outpost of almost savage humanity.

That Odyssey might seem worthy of a modern Homer's epic; to them it was the merest commonplace of existence. Through frightful, almost impassable passes; across soaring cloud-wreathed summits; piercing appalling canyons; following foaming creeks, whose wild waters vanished in veils of mist down depths lost in obscurity; always on and on, the two men, foot by foot, fought their way ever northward. Creek after creek was panned without a trace of treasure to reward and inspire their labors; nevertheless each failure meant no more than that another creek could be abandoned, and but narrowed the ground yet to be covered before that last flow would direct them to the source of the waiting fortune.

Then they had come upon this immense plateau, and as they dropped down to it lying several thousand feet below the average fifteen thousand they had arrived at, there could just be discerned another range of high peaks far in the haze of the distance, and they reckoned fifty miles would barely span the crossing to them. And to this range the urge of the unknown, the lure of wealth, the spirit of high adventure—all drove them irresistibly forward.

That this plateau had been the scene of enormous convulsions was unmistakable, for deep rents and crevices meandered and crisscrossed in every direction; crags and sheer bluffs of a totally alien nature dotted it; and millions of great boulders were profusely strewn over its every acre.

Of course such rock-wise men as Elkins and Haines could not fail to note that the glassy vitreous surface of the canyons, faces of bluffs and many boulders evidenced the fiery breath that eons past had scorched the solid rock as though

it was brown paper; but as rubies, like most other gems, are born in the anguish of inconceivable heat, in spite of the toil and privation the crossing entailed the two men endured it with fortitude, and even regarded the desolation with some favor.

Yet in four days by well-nigh incredible labor they had not crossed the half of it, though from a high bluff they had come to the conclusion that the plateau was considerably wider than they had first estimated. Then just before sundown of the fourth day they reached the edge of the huge abyss; for no other word could convey a correct impression of the great depth and sheer walls that enclosed that enormous depression.

Quite suddenly a canyon they had been following had fallen away into the void of empty space, and coming to the edge of that nothingness, and peering over, they found themselves gazing in speechless wonder at what was apparently another world altogether. Hundreds of feet below, billow after billow of dense forests covered the undulating bottom of a vast depression, whose opposite wall was so distant that, even from their elevation, it could be discerned only as a narrow shadowy ribbon whose ends meandered into haze and invisibility. Exactly below lay the silver blue of a small lake, and other gleaming patches in the distance seemed to denote that a considerable stream, widening into basins, flowed diagonally across; though the extreme length could be marked only by the summits of ranges enclosing them.

It was as marvelous as a mirage, immense, a paradise of delight, after the setting of desolation and sterility the staring men had fought with for days; and for men who had hardly more than wet their parched throats in the last twenty-four hours.

Yet Elkins, who by nature was a born scientist, and indeed possessed a fair degree of geological learning, had at once stared shrewdly at the frowning walls where prominent buttresses rendered them visible; and in his hardly conscious mutter probably summed the matter very closely. "A huge fault in the strata—a bad jolt—and down she drops in a solid chunk; while the molten stuff below is squeezed each side and lifts the hills a trifle." Then Haines, whose eyes had no concern with anything save the water, had broken in on his musings, and he too became absorbed in the problem of reaching it; and after a little vain peering decided that whether they followed the crest east or west the descent was a pure gamble, and likely a very hazardous one.

VERY soon, the sun sliding below the horizon, they were turning to seek shelter in the canyon from a chill night air that commenced to flow over the bluff's edge, and Elkins, delaying a second to stare thoughtfully into the gathering dusk, suddenly cried sharply: "Look, Tom! what sort of birds are those?" and Haines, whipping around, was just in time to catch a glimpse of the last winged thing as it vanished into the forest.

"The Sam Hill! they must be as large as ostriches! Why, at that distance a condor would seem no bigger than a sparrow!" he exclaimed in some astonishment.

"And there was at least half a dozen of them — I just noted them as they crossed the narrow neck," explained Elkins, referring to the western end of the waters where it dwindled to a fourth its middle width. "But after all, I reckon it's the half light on the water sort of balls things up, for there's no birds that big in all South America," he asserted with careless conviction.

"That's so," agreed Haines, "but likely they're big waterfowl anyway; and with

luck we'll have roast bird tomorrow," he added very contentedly; and so the matter was dismissed as a quite insignificant happening.

For some time in the cold starlight the two men sat smoking and talking of this amazing depression; mainly from the angle of its chancing to prove the source of the waterfowl's discovery; for undoubtedly such an expanse of water would tempt the birds to break their passage across the sterile ranges; and in spite of the bitter cold of night, the gnawing of hunger—for the last morsel of dried meat had vanished that morning—and the bite of thirst, they were highly elated and made light of their discomfort.

"Shall we chance it?" queried Elkins, staring down gravely at the hundred foot drop that yet separated them from the rubble slope that fringed the wall's bottom.

"Damned if I know, Joe—one slip would end a guy's thirst for keeps," replied Haines slowly. "Yet it looks like it's this drop or nothing," he added thoughtfully.

Now it was noon and the molten sun had heated the shadeless rocks to a pitch when a careless touch meant a seared cuticle, and the green shade so close to them seemed an unbelievable heaven.

Since dawn they had followed the crest, first to the east, then to the westward; and the endless ravines and canyons opening out into this vast depression had made the going slow and infinitely laborious. At last they had returned to the only spot where they deemed descent was in the least feasible: a gully that cut into the wall far deeper than any they had discovered. No more than a hundred feet was the height of its last great step, which ended in a slope of jagged rubble where nothing but clumps of tough dwarf scrub could find nutrition. Yet—with luck—it was possible; for its face was broken with many fairly wide shelves, and much of the rock was threaded with seams and crevices that a desperate man by the grace of fortune might lower himself by. Here and there undoubtedly would be spots where he must drop and trust to keeping his balance on a shelf below. But still it was barely possible; and already the torment of the fire of thirst was weakening them, and they knew that shortly this last chance would be closed to nerves and muscles sapped of their virility.

"That's the way I size it—we'll take a chance," said Elkins with quick decision; for by unspoken consent in any crucial matter the final word seemed ever to rest with the speaker. "But we'll lash the blankets about the pack before we sling them over—though we daren't chance the guns that way." And after some peering over and discussion of the line of their descent, they lashed both packs, the pans and cooking-ware in the center, around with blankets and made one bundle of them. With a dull sound it hit the rubble and bounded to the slope's foot.

"Hope that billy ain't busted," said Haines anxiously; and in a moment the two men, a few feet apart, were carefully, though coolly, lowering themselves over a drop that spelt instant and horrible destruction if a hand failed to hold or a fragment of stone came away in its clutching fingers.

"Well, that's that!" said Elkins cheerfully as his partner dropped the last dozen feet of sheer rock face to the slope he stood on.

"And it's a sure thing nothing but a fly could make it back again," said the new arrival, breathing heavily, for his solid build had felt the severe strain more than his partner's steel sinews. And his statement was by no means a grim exaggeration; for in a couple of places, high up, the wall face had lacked a single

niche for a finger and they had been compelled to chance a drop of many feet to a ledge beneath; and on one of these occasions but for Haines' herculean arm Elkins would have failed to recover his balance and swayed backward into space — but that was all in the game, and neither spoke nor thought any more of it.

A HASTY examination relieved their anxiety of damage to their hardware, which seemed to concern them much more than the daring skill of their descent, and quickly shouldering the packs they commenced to make their way along the rubble slope to the lake, which lay about a couple of miles distant. The sun beat full upon the towering wall and the heat in the narrow passage between it and the tall forest was as stifling as an airless boiler room with the furnace gates wide open; but a thorny jungle fringed and invaded the still depths, and it would have been an arduous waste of precious time to pierce this barrier; so doggedly they went on through the heat and rough going, with their thoughts entirely centered on the mighty reward awaiting them. Yet now and again they thought they heard the tinkling of running water in the distance, and by its persistence arrived at the conclusion that a large creek must be running lakeward.

By careful note of some projecting spurs and massive bosses from the heights above they had little difficulty in deciding where they must strike into the forest to hit the lake; and with much labor and swearing broke through the rim of jungle, which here had greatly narrowed, and entered the forest proper; and even in their exhausted and water-famished condition they could not avoid noting the strangeness of some of the great growths which here and there they met in almost isolated clumps and single specimens amid the usual rank growths of a tropic forest. Before one unusually large growth Elkins halted for a moment and surveying it with a puzzled frown exclaimed hoarsely, "These trees are queer — look at this joker! Ever seen anything like it, Tom?" he asked irritably, as one tired of marvels and impatient of yet having to observe them.

"It ain't a beauty," acknowledged Haines, severely regarding the tree. "Looks like it was as old as Satan, and a damned heap more wicked," he added with increasing disfavor.

And indeed the strange giant had a most forbidding exterior; for its immense bole, that was lost in the green canopy fully a hundred feet above them, was covered with large horn-like scales that rose in their centers to sharp dark-hued points that bore a striking resemblance to the poisoned talon on the end of the tail of a scorpion. Sharp, curved, and shading to a glistening black, they possessed a most repellent and vicious appearance, and very evidently would be wicked things for any flesh that brushed against them; while to add to the suspicion of latent hostility the thing aroused in the observer, each horny scale had a straggly fringe of coarse gristly hairlike threads drooping from its edges and thinly veiling it. Its foliage was invisible, but crooked scaly limbs could be made out in the dim light overhead. Truly the thing was abnormal, an enigma, and entirely distasteful to the two who stared at it, as though something hoary, unnatural and incredibly aged had stepped from the abortions of the primeval and come to poison a gentler creation with its fierce malice and foulness.

"Curious," muttered Elkins as though thinking aloud, "there was once—hell! that's a crazy notion. Say, let's get a move on; my throat's burning up for a mouthful of water."

And thereafter they paid no attention

to other like growths and still others, fantastic and unnatural but not so markedly unlovely, that they met with. But one peculiarity of these strange growths had a profound bearing on the partners' fortunes; for oddly there was but little underbrush where they flourished, and almost involuntarily the men's steps inclined from their course to avail themselves of the clearings. This accounted for their striking the lake near its center instead of at the narrow neck they aimed for. Likely this saved their lives, for, unwitting of the deadly peril they had come into, most probably their bodies would have been slashed to ribbons before they realized the savage nature of the winged brutes that swooped down on them.

Both were stretched full length on a shelf of flat rock that, almost level with the lake's surface, reached some yards out into a shallow; and each man was gulping great drafts of elixir as though he would drink on forever. Behind them lay a narrow strip of pinky quartz outcropping that rimmed the lake for some way each side of them; behind that lay a dense thicket of stout growths much the size and appearance of northern alders.

ELKINS was the first to hear the dull beat of heavy wings approaching; looking up he stared in the direction the sound came from, which was to westward of the narrow neck they had thought to hit.

"Say, Tom!" he exclaimed, "just look at this bunch, will you? Fresh meat, sure enough—but what the devil are they?" And Haines, raising his head from drinking, stared also at the flying things that about a quarter of a mile away were coming at a great speed toward them; though the odd powerful wings beat so slowly that their passage seemed more the swoop of a hawk than an effort of their wings.

"What sort of birds are they?" cried Haines in amazement. "Unless my eyes are on the blink I'm blessed if they got a feather on them."

And as he spoke a duck rose squawking from the surface right in front of the strange things and made off at full speed for a bed of reeds. There came a downward drive by one brute a little ahead of his companions; an enormous beak gaped and in a flash had closed on the fleeing bird. That was all; there was no more to be seen of the duck than there is of a midge snapped up by a bat!

"By ——!" cried Elkins blankly. "What's this? bolt a duck at a mouthful! Say! these brutes are making for us! Quick, Tom, beat it to the bush! those beaks could slash a limb off."

Luckily these were men accustomed to quick decision and instant action; but at that, they reached cover a few yards away not a second too soon. For in spite of their deliberate movement of wing, which afforded a false impression, they came up at an immense pace, and the two men had no more than burst into the shelter of a grove of thick-foliaged lesser growths that for some distance here fringed the giants beyond, when the thud of the wings of the foremost brutes was above them and the air resounded with harsh loud cries of bestial savagery.

Peering out through the stout stems they saw the brutes withdraw a little, and, after some fluttering about the edge of the water, arise to a hundred feet or so, and there more slowly pass backward and forward like pointers quartering a covert. But the little time they hovered had sufficed to show the amazed watchers the extraordinary appearance these things presented, and the fact that they bore not the least resemblance to any species of bird they had ever seen or heard of—if bird they could be called. For save in possessing wings and beaks there lay no

feature that could be identified as falling certainly into that classification; rather were they the abortions that alcohol-crazed victims screaming flee from.

Great, featherless, hairless monsters with angular, ungainly bodies not less than five or six feet long ending in short thick legs with long clawed feet that seemed covered with horny plates. Above, long snaky necks ending in blunt thick heads that without a break ran into enormous beaks nearly a third of their body in length; thick, wide, sharp-pointed, and it seemed as though the edges were deeply serrated; one glance was enough to realize that these would be terrible weapons, quite capable of stabbing and slashing a strong man to ribbons. And their wings with their full fifteen-foot stretch, like a dirty brown parchment in hue and texture; leathery stuff through which ridges of bone and gristle were plainly visible, and what looked like a couple of long curved talons on the outer edge; these things were all in the picture the astounded men stared at. To the greasy, sickening flapping of their monstrous wings, the brutes were horrible, crude, and brutal beyond expression, as was the strong rank odor as of putrid meat that saturated the air with its filthiness on their first close onslaught.

"Don't shoot, Tom!" said Elkins quickly as he laid a restraining hand on his partner's upflung arm and gun. "Better save our shells—we may need them. No saying how many of these hell-fired things roost in this pit; and maybe there'll be trouble getting clear of it."

"But what are these damned things? I never heard tell of the like of them. They ain't birds, that's certain," growled Haines as he blankly stared at the last one flap along the lake's edge and beyond his range of vision.

"They've got me guessing," confessed Elkins. "There was once——" he commenced, then broke off short and impatiently muttered, "But that's just craziness!" and continued, "We just got to take the facts as we find them—we've run up against some sort of brutes we never heard of, but they're facts, and there ain't a doubt in the world but any one of those queer things could rip a guy up easy as look at him; and seemingly they're partial to living meat. We saw ten of them—Lord only knows how many more of the breed there may be around us. I tell you, Tom, I don't fancy the look of things," he added thoughtfully.

"No. I ain't stuck on the uglies myself," said Haines simply. "Seems to me one of us must stand sentry any time we fossick around in the open, and keeping close to cover I reckon we won't get hurt any," suggested Haines in the matter-of-fact tone in which one would discuss the most commonplace occurrence. For his solid, unimaginative nature was quite content to accept the evidence of his senses without troubling overmuch whether it offended common sense, or the common interpretation of such.

A LITTLE while they quietly listened to the flapping wings as in ever widening circles the brutes slowly drifted away from them, and shortly the sound died away in the distance. Then they came to the wood's edge, and after carefully scanning the vicinity, commenced to make their way cautiously eastward about the lake's edge. But now, though refreshed by the water, they suffered much from hunger; for no more than a handful or so of raw beans had they eaten in the last two days. However, luck was now with them, and in a narrow sheltered slough they flushed a large waterfowl from its nest in the reeds; instantly Elkins had cut its head off with a .38-bore bullet. After the report had ceased to shatter the breathless silence,

for a moment they heard a distant harsh screaming, but it ceased abruptly, and nothing further happening, very quickly a smokeless blaze had the hastily skinned bird scorching over it. That and a billy of steaming *maté* made new men of them; and as the day was far spent and the spot snug for camping they decided to go no farther, but have a long night in and start with completely restored vigor at dawn. They had little fear of being attacked during the night, as they were satisfied that the brutes, being unembarrassed by the midday sun, would not likely be abroad in the darkness; nevertheless they agreed to take turn about in watching and sleeping.

As dusk descended, the hush and peace that surrounded them seemed as perfect and innocuous as a New England countryside on a summer sundown. It was hard to believe that but an hour or two back, seconds only had separated them from the ghastly death that had descended like a whirlwind with strange terrible shapes astride it. But though the men contentedly smoking by the firelight might have been no more than a couple of camping fishermen enjoying a well-earned vacation, yet each man was immersed in a train of thought that fishermen would scarcely indulge in.

Haines' thoughts ran all on a ledge he had marked as worthy of close examination, and Elkins, whose ideas ranged farther and were always seething with speculative queries and delvings, was full of a brilliant invention for minting hard cash out of the weird abortions that had assailed them.

"See here, Tom," he exclaimed as the thought boiled over, "I wouldn't wonder but the hide of one of those brutes might be worth a tidy few dollars if we toted it back to the coast — those highbrow museums just eat up such things."

"What, the hide of a blasted thing like that?" said Haines in surprize, but as he had a great respect for his partner's more nimble gray matter he added more hopefully, "And can you put a figure to it, Joe?"

"A figure? Well, I dunno exactly, but I do call to mind that some old bones of a beast dead thousands of years ago fetched well into four figures," replied Elkins thoughtfully as he recalled some odd paragraph he had come on in his omnivorous reading; for when opportunity offered he had an insatiable thirst for devouring every scrap of information on the natural sciences he could assimilate from periodicals and other sources adapted to the needs of the layman.

"Four figures!" echoed Haines. "Oh, that's another matter. Then if luck's against us we'll shoot up the whole caboodle and start in the hide and bone business. Say! maybe there's a bunch more of those uglies! Hell! I hope there's a thousand," he exclaimed enthusiastically, the prospect of such good fortune overriding any doubt of success as he stared out into the starlit water, as though trusting to see there an immediate response to his rapacious ambition. And even Elkins, who in spite of his imagination was a very shrewd reasoner and clearly saw the many obstacles to be overcome, caught a little of his enthusiasm. Moreover, though the precious metals and gems were the main motif of their existence, yet the exigency of living had interested them in oil, orchids, feathers, rubber, and even the hides of devils if thereby they came by hard cash to forward their search for El Dorado.

HAINES was sleeping, and Elkins standing the first sentry go, when the night commenced to unbosom itself of strange loud noises that seemingly had their source far to the westward, where the lake greatly narrowed and the

winged things had vanished. Wonderingly he had listened to a hoarse coughing bellow that spilled itself suddenly into the stillness. The sound, allowing for the distance, was of preposterous volume, like that of a dozen wrath-inflamed bull challenges rolled into one. It ceased, then in a moment broke out afresh, and now another great throat was adding its quota to the hollow reverberations that came booming through the darkness. As he nudged Haines the sounds abruptly hurled themselves into each other in a typhoon blast of savagery.

"What in Sam Hill is this?" cried the awakened man as he leapt to his feet. "Hell's a-popping out there—they must be bull elephants, or dragons belike mixing it! I never heard such a rumpus," he declared as beside Elkins he strode from the fire and at the water's edge stood staring into the shapeless blur of the distance.

"Dragons?" growled Elkins harshly, and in his voice lay a curious recognition of an appropriate word just discovered. "Dragons?—maybe that's a better guess than you reckon," he muttered half to himself. "Anyhow I ain't sorry the length of the water lays between us and those scrapping devils; and it strikes me, Tom, this blasted pit is all loco. What say, shall we up stakes and beat it in the morning?" And as he spoke there became audible the crash of rending wood fibers crackling like far-away gunfire, and the most hideous monstrous snarling that could be imagined.

"My ——!" cried Haines. "Whatever they are they must be as large as houses! At this distance what sounds like dry sticks must surely be real big timber being busted—what sort of land is this we've got to?"

"I dunno," replied Elkins savagely. "But there ain't a doubt we'd better get out of it; I reckon we would be no more than humming-birds to beasts like those scrappers. Just listen to that, will you?" he broke off suddenly, silenced by the enormity of the huge scream of brute agony that seeped the air with its poignant passion and swept the very skies with a titanic wrath and malign protest at the torture it suffered. Then, as a light blown out, it ceased, and a silence assailed the listeners, a silence that seemed even more filled with frightful things.

After waiting awhile, but no further uproar arising, they returned to the fire, and shortly Elkins was slumbering as peacefully as a babe in its mother's arms.

THE dawn and a hearty though single-coursed breakfast found them not so set on quitting, or at any rate the matter was by tacit agreement left in abeyance; though they resolved to exercise the greatest caution in their movements. But what sort of monsters they might have to deal with they could not conceive, therefore being not unduly loquacious men they wasted no time in idle discussion.

With guns ready at half cock, and every sense keyed to highest pitch, they resumed their passage along the water's edge. Here and there one or the other would pick at the numerous outcroppings, or wash a pan or two of gravel from the banks or shingle beaches. But though everywhere they found fine gold, yet there was never a sign of crimson stone, nor was the gold heavy enough to work with profit.

Nevertheless the ground was sufficiently interesting to raise their hopes to a pitch of anticipation that almost blinded them to the extraordinary nature of the creatures they had run up against; for these were men of the breed who dare everything and would challenge all the might of hell itself if it opposed the insatiable craving that obsessed their reckless determination.

As they had shrewdly suspected, there

could be no doubt but that in some bygone age a great river had swept through this country, and the placid lake was the last remnant of its greatness. For everywhere lay the evidence of gravel deposits and naked outcropping of eroded rock rising in low ridges above and between the imprisoned detritus, just as the play of flood and drought had filled the chasms and scoured the rock crests free of the burden the flow had for untold ages laid on them. Numerous small creeks had also furrowed the deposits with deep gashes. At the lower extremity of the lake they came upon a twenty-foot-wide overflow gliding and vanishing into the gloom and tangle of the forest depths; so it was very probable that a similar stream emptied itself into the lake at the upper narrow end.

It was as they neared this upper end that Elkins had discovered in his pan three tiny crimson fragments—the merest grains, almost microscopic, but under a pocket glass indisputably revealed as the lure that had driven them through the vast ranges and into this lonely land of nightmare creations.

"That settles it," declared the finder triumphantly. "All the devils from hell may be hidden in there, but I'm going through with it. After all, two .38s aren't a bad line of argument to meet any sort of damned brute with."

Though unvoiced, as they drew closer, they had viewed with distrust and query what was apparently the haunt of the savage winged creatures and the scene of the fierce uproar in the night. Of the former they had no particular concern; for they could not free themselves of the impression that in spite of their weird appearance and savagery, the things were simply extraordinary birds, and as such could hardly be reckoned as menacing assailants; moreover, so long as cover was handy and a sharp lookout maintained, they could easily evade an attack by them. But the brutes that had fought so savagely, and rent the very night with their frightful uproar, and splintered trees as though they were no more than brittle reeds—these things were another matter. For there could be no shadow of doubt but such brutes must be enormous and terrible antagonists. True, they were inconceivable, incomprehensible, monsters without name or history; nevertheless that did not make them any the less solid and menacing facts, and likely as not one might as well wear brown paper as the armor of dauntless courage when dealing with such gigantic savagery; and these men were neither fools nor movie heroes, but merely iron-souled prospectors, accustomed, in the ordinary routine of their business, to take many a long chance in the gamble with death.

But those tiny crimson grains had instantly turned distrust into indifference, and as Elkins had recklessly declared, the forest might be a hive of escaped devils but that wouldn't hinder him from entering it; and Haines growling his approval of the sentiment, without hesitation they resumed their panning and passed steadily on to whatever might be awaiting them.

Here the lake was no more than a half-mile wide and rapidly narrowing to the end about a like space distant. The outcroppings were now rising into knolls and low bluffs that invaded and vanished in the fringing groves; and the banks of gravel descended to rubble beaches in sheer drops that topped the heads of the treasure-seekers, now gravely exultant, for pan after pan held in its crescent residue more of the crimson grains, now coarser and to be identified by the naked eye as small rubies. It was plain that somewhere beyond lay the storehouse that had spilled these minute fragments of its treasure abroad.

Suddenly Haines called excitedly, "See here, Joe!—that's more like it!" and held out the pan to Elkins, who had been standing impatiently inactive; as they had agreed that only one of them should prospect while the other kept guard for assailants; and Haines being the more adroit and faster in handling his pan had performed most of the washing after the first little grains had delighted them.

"Yes," said Elkins enthusiastically, "that sure is a pretty sight for sore eyes."

His hand dipped into the shallow pan and picked out a little fragment the size of a small white bean; and the blood crimson of its fiery depths glowing as a living spirit through the unpolished vitreous surface proclaimed certainly its perfection and value. Even in that little stone lay many a day's provender and simple luxuries for the finder.

"That's the start of——" began Haines, but never finished the sentence; for a yell from Elkins snapped it short.

"Look out, Tom!—here's another of those devils!" he shouted in urgent warning, and before Haines had time to move a finger he saw his companion's rifle flick to his shoulder and upward, and as the crash of the instant explosion shattered the deathly stillness and echoed from the wall of forest, a dark mass not fifty feet above them with thrashing wings shot past and over the water.

"Got him! between the eyes!" cried Elkins jubilantly. "See, he's falling! Curse the blasted thing!" he added in bitter triumph, as a hundred feet away the ungainly evil-looking beast suddenly went into a spinning headlong dive; for a second it righted itself, then dropped and with a hollow crash hit the water. A vast convulsion of flailing leathery wings sent the foam flying in clouds and almost hid it from the watching men. Then something happened that left them breathless with amazement and staring blankly at each other.

"What was that? Did you see it, Joe? —or am I crazy!" said Haines slowly as he turned to stare again at the heaving water where not a sign of the stricken brute was visible and only the speeding ripples were evidence of what had happened, and the monstrous nightmare thing they had seen rise above the surface and engulf what had lain there.

"Crazy!" echoed Elkins angrily. "No, but it will be a miracle if we both ain't before we get quit of this blasted pit; for we've struck a land where nightmare shapes are solid things and ordinary facts ain't got a leg to stand on. Crazy? No, we ain't crazy; it's old Father Time has got balled up in his bean, and spewed out things that ain't got no right to be living. Of course it's all crazy—but by ——, it's facts!" cried Elkins harshly, and Haines listened not at all understanding what his partner was driving at.

"What you're spilling I ain't got a notion, Joe. But I do know that all the gems in this hell-fired hole wouldn't make me cross that water. Why, a guy would need a six-inch gun to tackle that unholy dragon—I thought such things were kept special for booze-soaked guys and fairy-tales," replied Haines as with a dazed troubled stare he still regarded the heaving water.

"Well, this is how I size it up—but I reckon we might as well get under cover and have a bite while we palaver," said Elkins, turning to enter the grove of lesser growths that ribboned the wall of giant forest.

A LITTLE way in they seated themselves on some mossy boulders, by design opposite each other so as to command a view in every direction; and eating from a billy of cold boiled beans Elkins gave his view of the conundrum.

"Well, I reckon you'll think I'm bugs or dreaming, but it ain't no crazier than what we've seen," said Elkins, lighting his pipe after a hasty meal at which no fire was lighted in case it might betray them to unknown monsters. "Right here I reckon we're in a tight corner, and we'll have to keep our eyes skinned if we want to get clear of it; but we're on the track of a fortune and I'm damned if I quit without a try for it — ain't that right, Tom?" he gravely asked his partner.

"Sure, that's me," replied Haines simply.

"Now you saw that gray white thing with a head like a Chinese devil and the size of a big barrel, and a great gash of a long-toothed jaw, blunt-ended and all whiskery like seaweed, and the yellow and slime of the inside of it, which was like to make a guy vomit, as that gash grabbed at the winged devil flogging the water with its fifteen-foot stretch of wing —just a snap and it was gone, easy as a trout flicks up a fly skimming above it. Now what sort of a beast that we are wise to could get away with a mouthful like that?"

"None I ever heard tell of," replied Haines with conviction.

"Or those winged uglies—or the racket put up by the things that ramped somewhere around here last night. Seems like it numbs the brain just to think of it; but there's one sort of answer, and it fits like a glove every one of the crazy shapes we've set eyes on. They're all quite natural in the notion, so I don't see no way out of it. First along, those blasted trees started me thinking; then birds without feathers and wicked as Satan gave me a jolt that really set memory working, for it wasn't possible to make a mistake over things like those. I couldn't believe it, but a kid would have noted how like they were to the pictures in books telling about such queer brutes; and now this great water devil—I tell you, Tom, all are wrote about in the books I've studied odd times. Beasts that ramped around Lord only knows how many hundred thousand years back, and whose bones are sometimes found a hundred foot deep in solid stone. I can't call to mind but few of the names the highbrows tag them with, mostly Latin and Greek I reckon, but that winged thing was a Peter — something or other, and the dragon the spit of a breed labeled Dinosaurs. I've turned it over and over but I can't get away from it but these damned freaks are the same as what were in those books— what they call prehistoric monsters. If that's the truth of it, then me and you, Tom, are up against a hard proposition, for some of those beasts stood twenty feet high and could bolt us whole without any chewing," he declared thoughtfully, as carefully knocking the ashes from his pipe on to a bare rock he eyed them in frowning abstraction.

"Twenty feet!" repeated Haines, and then was silent in contemplation of the hugeness it pictured.

"Sure, in a museum they got a leg-bone as thick as your middle," assured Elkins with the parental pride of your true scientist.

"But if those things cashed in all that while back, how do you reckon some chance to be still living down here?" queried Haines with a pertinacity for detail not uncommonly met with in men of his practical type.

"Well, I dunno—I ain't wise to that," admitted Elkins shortly. "Maybe about a million years back the land had a jolt that let drop this plateau in a solid chunk, and so walled the brutes in as a prison and whatever was the cause of the breed passing out couldn't get at them. But that's just a guess; all we're dead sure of is what we've clapped our eyes on—and no logic or learning can give the lie to that," he

asserted simply. And as his past studies could afford no further light on the matter, and time and fate were hard on their heels, they left discussion to a time of more leisure. For their mode of life had bred in their blood an impatience of inaction and mere words, and a strong bias in favor of decision and instant action when danger threatened. Moreover, they had no thought of abandoning the search before they had satisfied themselves one way or another if fortune was hid there or not.

Foot by foot they sampled the gravel banks, though by reason of frequent halts to listen intently and scan the way ahead their progress was much retarded. But far or near nothing stirred, and the quiet was as that of a painted picture or the silence of the dead, and over all as a shroud lay the stifling heat in which their pigmy figures, seemingly no more important than maggots bred in festering filth, ceaselessly nibbled at Mother Earth as they slowly pressed onward.

So they came to the lake's extremity, where a deep creek entered it between the high banks of a conglomerate of clay and pebble of cement-like hardness. The banks became more lofty a little way in and the gloom of the dense forest roof imparted an intangible air of mystery and menace to the narrow passage. Even their hardihood disliked its treacherous appearance and for a moment they hesitated, in doubt if it would not be better to reconnoiter the vicinity somewhat. But impatience overruled prudence, for the pan had proved that the nearer they approached this somber channel the dirt became richer, and though no stone equaled the one in Haines' pouch, yet nearly a dozen fragments now lay there almost as well worth the saving.

"We got to chance it!" said Elkins impatiently after a few seconds' survey. "Might take an hour to run over the ground, and then a brute could amble along any moment; besides, if we go quiet, the rush of the water and height of the banks will hide us from sight or hearing of anything not actually staring down on us," he urged, reasonably enough.

"That's right," said Haines. "And if ever I saw a likely spot for fossicking it's right ahead of us," he added with the fever of the search firing his voice.

WITHOUT further hesitation they entered the cutting, and making their way along a narrow edge of rubble that lay at each side of the water were soon absorbed again in panning, though as before only Haines did the washing while Elkins remained on guard.

At once it became apparent that their high expectations stood some chance of being justified, for pan after pan bequeathed more of the crimson pebbles to their pouches, even now and again a specimen larger than the one first placed there.

"Why, Joe, we must have a tidy stake on us right now," said Haines as he handed his partner another fragment to pouch.

"Depends on their quality, but I reckon they're beauties—maybe five hundred dollars lays on us this moment," replied Elkins, adjudging the weight in his hand; for though no expert, yet his knowledge of gems was greater than his partner's.

"Then even if there ain't nothing larger in this dirt, still we could scrape a small fortune out of it in a few days' panning," exclaimed Haines, anxiously waiting for a corroboration of the statement.

But Elkins made no answer, instead stood keenly eyeing the opposite bank where a stray spear of sunlight had lit on a vein of dark pebbles recently exposed by a miniature landslide of the dirt and trailing vines that had faced them.

Haines looked up in surprize at his partner's sudden apathy. "Hear anything?" he queried in a low voice.

"No," replied Elkins slowly, then

sighed deeply as though just awakened. "But take a squint over there, will you? —if that ain't what we're after, then it's damned like it!" And Haines after one sharp look at the extremity of the light shaft agreed with the speaker.

"Holy prophets!" he exclaimed; "it's like as though a crimson fire burned there!" And he stared at the glowing spot that the spear point rested on. An eye of flaming light at least a couple of inches in diameter, it seemed as truly living as any wild feline's they had ever gazed on.

"I reckon this water ain't more than waist-high," was all that Elkins said, as, slipping off his pack, he raised it shoulder-high, and with rifle gripped in the hand of the circling arm he led the way into the black waters.

"I RECKON we'd better stop and beat it, Joe," said Haines hoarsely, "or we'll be toting back common pebbles. I can't trust my eyes no longer to tell one from the other," he complained in a shaking voice.

For some while they had been working feverishly but silently, the first burst of incredulous wonder having burnt itself out in the succeeding realization that each stone they handled was without question a gem of the first water, and the storehouse they lay in apparently inexhaustible. A vein a bare six inches wide running diagonally across a face of clay and common rubble, it meandered from the beach several feet upward; and every other stone they picked from it was a blood-red precious gem. Many the size of a large filbert, a few the bigness of a walnut, and a couple of magnificent finds, lay beside the pile between them, the size and shape of an ordinary hen's egg. Even from the debris that had sloughed from the wall could have been garnered a pailful of lesser stones; but with such a treasure chest in front of them these were neglected. Their pouches early had been filled to bursting, so they had hastily scooped a hollow in the loose rubble and set their finds in it. Just a pile of glowing crimson pebbles, but the least among them would equal in value the figure earned by twelve months of hard labor.

Wealth beyond avarice! It was no dream; stone by stone they had handled it. At last Fate had smiled on them; but behind her apparent kindliness lay a taunting jeer of malice, as with one hand she thrust her gift upon them, while the other had already the fingers crooked to snatch away her treasures.

Likely the noise of the water—for though an unhurried flow and at most points quite fordable, yet close above a ridge of rock made a swirl of clamorous rapids—and the sharp bend in the creek just below had held them unaware of the approach of the enormous thing that came shuffling along the creek bed and suddenly appeared from around the turning not a hundred yards below the intent workers, who had recklessly abandoned all pretense of caution, and indeed, for the moment had forgotten everything save their delirious greed in the discovery.

The colossal thing ceased to shuffle, and craning its long thick neck forward stared eagerly at the pigmy figures; then snuffed at the air suspiciously, as though the odor of the human species was something new and incomprehensible. And the sound of that vast inhalation was as the sough of a sudden blast of wind amid the forest tops.

In a flash the bent figures had whirled around, and each had swept up his rifle and snapped the safety catch wide open. But in the same second all thought of using such insignificant weapons had deserted them; for obviously it was an inane absurdity to dream of tackling such a monstrous creature with anything less ef-

fective than a field gun, or preferably a trench mortar. Never had they imagined that anything so vast, unnatural and savage-looking could exist even in that lair of horrific things. It was so entirely out of proportion with its surroundings, as though it had been intended for a much larger scheme of creation, but by some mishap had strayed to our planet where the Lilliputian hills and trees and living things could never be anything save a contemptible substitute for the majestic objects it was exiled from.

Fully three times the height of a very tall man, it towered nearly a half of its height above the banks as it stood erect on huge hind limbs very similar to those of a kangaroo; and though hidden by the water very probably there lay below an abnormal length of foot, so marked a feature in the marsupial. But this was no harmless giant of that innocent species; for its upper half bore a striking resemblance to an enormous crocodile, being covered with a yellowish scaly armor, and the short forelimbs, though thick as a man's thigh, were taloned as a saurian and plainly had no part in the brute's locomotion, while the frightful head and jaws, though a solid mass of horn and hooked at the extremity of what could only be termed the upper mandible, had the blunt end and rapacious hugeness of a crocodile's. One could imagine cattle and horses being torn to pieces by that terrible beak as easily as a hawk picks the bones of a chicken.

The whole effect was paralyzing; there was about it such an air of irresistible might, diabolical savagery, and such a sensed mixing of the species, a welding of bird, beast, and reptile, that it deprived the aghast men of the power of rational thought, and all they could conceive in the line of action was an instant flight.

"Quick, Tom!" whispered Elkins hoarsely. "Mount my shoulder; we must get out of this! I'll sling the packs up, and you give me a hand—if we're quick I reckon we may make it."

As he spoke he leapt in a flash to the top of a near-by heap of rubble that, fallen from the bank, had made a step nearly waist-high up it. In a second Haines had mounted the stooped back, and swung from there to the bank's crest. Without a fraction of a second's pause two packs landed beside him as he hung over with arm outstretched and gripped Elkins' upflung fingers.

Normally both men were as hard as wire nails and as active as mountain goats, and now speeded up by the appalling sight so close to them the move was completed almost as smoothly and rapidly as the swoop of an eagle on its quarry. Yet none too soon did Elkins' feet rest on the bank's crest; for as he tore through the trailing vines the gigantic brute hurtled toward them in a flying leap that covered nearly a third of the space between. The splash of its landing sent a great wave crashing nearly to each bank's summit, and a slash of spray that drove like hail to the brush above. Just in the flick of an eyelid the two men saw this as they slipped their arms through the pack straps; then they were tearing through the thick, fringing brush, keeping close to each other.

"Make for the wall we dropped down, Tom—we got to get quit of this hellish hole somehow, and I reckon that blasted thing isn't a climber," called Elkins as they tore free of the brush and came into the tall timber. "By ——! It's up and after us!" he exclaimed as there came a tremendous crash in the tangle behind them. "Beat it for all you're worth! don't chance hiding," he admonished urgently.

Possibly they had a couple of hundred yards start of their pursuer; but what was that, when, as they had seen, the creature could cover a hundred feet at a single leap

and a thicket hindered it no more than so much dried grass? Luckily the tangle had been but a fringe of jungle luxuriating in the stronger light seeping through the scantier foliage above the creek; beyond this lay the tall timber where the underbrush was negligible, for the elevation of the plateau forbade the mad riot of vegetation engendered in the steaming plains a thousand miles to the east of it. Of course it was by no means easy going, and one unaccustomed to such gloomy depths would have been hopelessly lost in five minutes, but these men sensed direction as instantly and certainly as any wild creature, and though they made a hundred slight deviations to avoid clumps of lesser growths, yet they held true to the goal they aimed at, and laden as they were with pack and rifle tore ahead at a furious pace.

Crash after crash sounded close behind them, often so close that they feared the next second would bring the terrible thing hurtling on them. But apparently its amazing mode of locomotion was here a hindrance to its progress, for many of the young growths were too stout for even its great bulk to splinter, and too close together for it to penetrate. So very soon it came to the fleeing men that for all the brute's gigantic leaps and huge thews yet they were holding their own and might continue to do so until their strength failed them.

Whether it hunted by sound or scent, it was very certain of every step they had taken; for though several times by abrupt turns and swervings they essayed to evade detection yet the thud and crash followed always behind them. Shortly instinct informed them that they were obliquely closing on the point where they had dropped from the heights above, and also knew that soon the pace must slacken, for their heaving chests and thumping hearts seemed bound in by red-hot iron bands that every moment were growing tighter and more agonizing.

Had it not been for the heavy packs they would have thought little of such a race, and probably could soon have left the brute far behind them; but the lack of those packs would spell the end of their prospecting and entail hardship that even they would flinch from; as for their rifles, in such a remote spot the loss of them would almost certainly be a death warrant; to such men things like these are sacred and only to be surrendered with life itself.

"We got to let up for a spell soon, Joe!" panted Haines, whose heavy build felt the strain more than his partner's sparer flesh.

"Hold on, Tom!" encouraged his partner anxiously. "Just to that clump ahead —we'll slip around it and try out a few pills on this blasted brute—he's got to slow up coming round it and that will give us a chance to fix his lamps for him!" he cried savagely.

Crash! again came the splintering of young timber as the brute alighted not many hundred feet distant behind them; though save for infrequent more open spaces the giant growths were so thick together that the creature had little chance to display its prodigious leaping ability, and hindered by its vast bulk its progress had been no more rapid than that of the fleeing men.

Putting their last ounce of flagging muscle into it, they dashed to the clump ahead, tore through the thick barrier and raced to its nearest extremity. Behind a massive bole and a wide lane between them they awaited the brute's coming. Each knew that failure spelt the end of everything for at least one of them, but now their nerves were as calm and steady as the giant growths they pressed tight against; for many a time before had each man's life lain in the pressing of a trig-

ger, and so far they had no reason to doubt the efficacy of such a line of argument.

Thud! the thing had hurled itself to the barrier, and for a moment by the harsh rending and straining sounds the listeners knew that it was vainly essaying to force a passage through the stout stems. There was something strangely bird-like in the imbecility of the action, and one might imagine that a giant stupid fowl was there dashing itself against a barrier of wire-netting. But in a moment the beast part of it took the ascendancy and with sudden decision it ceased to assail the barrier, and in a leap came to the lower end, where the way was open; and now there was more than a hint of the reptile in the writhing shuffle of its turning and the manner in which the horrible head flicked from side to side as though undecided which trail of scent to follow. So it shuffled forward a few yards and came right between the waiting men; just caught a glimpse of one of the strange-odored things it had chased—and then the light winked out forever in the shattering report of two rifle shots blended together.

After that, chaos! indescribable cataclysmic unleashed primeval energy spilling its titanic force in convulsions of enormous muscles. Here! there! soaring in huge bounds in every direction, crashing into young growths and smashing them to splinters; ramming great boles with incredible thunderous impact that the very giants shivered under and for a second the battering-ram lay a quivering mountain of flesh below them; again to shoot upward in another convulsion and repeat the performance in another direction.

Now the bird spirit entirely controlled it; for on an infinitely magnified scale of space and time it was duplicating the riot of intense reflex action displayed by a decapitated chicken.

For some moments the men had their work cut out to avoid the terrific hurtlings of these monstrous convulsions; but shortly the first violence of the outburst had exhausted itself and the intervals grew longer between the spasms, and after one stupendous crash it lay stretched on the ground with its immense muscles bunching and twitching in waves of fast-diminishing virility; and then Haines risked a dash across to his partner.

"Ain't that the limit!" exclaimed Elkins as the two stood staring at the heaving brute.

"I'm darned if we ain't fixed him!" cried Haines exultantly.

"Just luck," replied the other man. "Those pills, or one of them, threaded its gray matter—likely no bigger than a hen's egg either; but being dumdum they scooped it clean. It's a stroke of luck that I ain't stuck on running up against again," he added thoughtfully.

"What would you reckon it is, Joe?" queried Haines in a tone of awed wonder.

"Search me!—though I did see a picture in the book that wasn't a bad likeness of the brute, but I don't call to mind what they named it," replied Elkins, knitting his brows in an unavailing effort of memory. "But whatever it is, maybe its dad and ma ain't dead, and like as not it had a mate, and I ain't dyin' to meet any of them. So I guess we better go find a way of quitting this nightmare," he declared emphatically.

"And pass up a fortune?" remonstrated Haines moodily.

"I don't see no way out of it—we ain't fixed for tackling such devils. This brute got his by a chance that might not happen again in another hundred years. No, I ain't scared of taking chances, but it's crazy to tackle these brutes with pea-shooters like we got. Next time we'll have the

right dope along with us," he asserted grimly.

"Next time!" repeated Haines with surprize and great content. "That's right—of course there'll be another day in our calendar. And what we got pouched will give some style to that outfit."

"Sure, we'll have hardware that can throw an ounce ball through armor plate, explosive shells to tickle 'em, and a case or two of dynamite—oh yes! we'll have the dope all right," agreed Elkins savagely. "But now we'd better get out of this as quick as we can beat it—though I reckon the brutes keep most to the waterways, and likely there's other lakes hid away in the forest where grub is handy for them—still keep your eyes skinned; maybe I'm wrong."

After a moment's delay while they listened intently for any sound that might betray that the great uproar had disturbed other frightful life in the vicinity, and failing to catch the faintest murmur in the absolute stillness that surrounded them, the two men picked up the packs they had hastily discarded just before the monster came between them, and with a last stare of fierce loathing at the monstrous carcass still pulsing with immense primeval virility, they left a scene that looked as though a battery of field guns had recently swept it.

MIDWAY in the afternoon they were back at the spot where they had first descended from the surrounding desolation. For miles they had followed the great wall westward and come on no spot that offered the faintest hope of ascent. Always the sheer heights rose in frowning bluffs that nothing lacking wings could surmount; and at last in despair they had retraced their steps to scan again the feasibility of what looked like their only hope of escape.

"I dunno," said Elkins slowly, "but it might be possible—save for that twenty foot in the middle," he added, pointing to a spot about half-way up, where the face of the bluff for a dozen feet seemed as smoothly shining as a pane of glass and not the slightest indication of a crevice or a prominence was visible.

"One could give another a lift from the ledge below it," replied Haines with no great surety of tone. "But the first up couldn't stir a finger to help the one below until he had climbed another dozen feet."

The fact was patent, for just above the glassy surface lay a stretch of sheer bluff where it would mean instant disaster for one ascending to endeavor to aid another. Apart from this the ascent was just possible to men with the iron nerves and muscles possessed by the two surveying it.

For a moment his partner was silent, apparently lost in deep consideration of the problem; then he observed abruptly: "It ain't no use foolin' about it; there's a show for one to make it—but not a chance in the world for the other. One of us must stop while the other beats it across the hills for a length of rope to fish him out with. I don't see no way out of it. For we got to move quick—the grub will just hold out to make that trip, and to go hunting around any lake down here is no more than plain suicide," he added coolly.

"But Joe," Haines expostulated, "ten days is the least one could make Arenas in, and that's the nearest settlement. That means twenty days for one of us alone in this damned hole!" And he was silent as he imagined the experience.

"Well, what of it? There's ledges around here where one could lie safe enough night times, and keeping hid daytime I reckon one could last out that long. Anyway we got to chance it, for there ain't a single liana to be found this high up," said Elkins, summing the situation briefly.

"Yes," said Haines very quietly, "and who do you reckon is stopping?"

"Why, *I* am!" replied Elkins sharply.

"You're wrong, Joe, *I* am," stated Haines as simply as a god might deliver an unalterable fiat. Elkins stared half fiercely, half whimsically at his partner.

"Of course a stick of dynamite couldn't budge you once you got your mule's mind set, but here's the answer!" said he with a half smile as stooping he picked from the rubble a couple of small fragments. "See, one's quartz, other's granite. You do the picking, and the guy who gets the quartz, he stops. Ain't that square?" he queried gravely.

"I guess so," agreed Haines unwillingly.

At once the stones were swirled around in a hat by Elkins, who then with a quick move turned it over on a flat slab, slid his hand underneath and withdrew the clenched fist with a fragment inside it.

"Now, which is which?" he asked quietly.

"White," replied Haines touching the clenched fingers, which thereupon fell open—and on to the slab tinkled a little granite fragment.

"That's that," said Elkins as cheerfully as though he had won a lottery. "Now we'll get busy; sooner you beat it the better. Wouldn't tote more than gun, billy, and grub; take the fishline up with you and I'll come down and hook them on," said he, referring to the stout line that lies in the pack of every prospector.

And after a little argument over the division of the beans, wherein Haines had his way by simply stating that "if you send up an ounce over a third of them I'll dump the lot over the edge," and arranging that whether he found a way up or not Elkins would return to this spot before the twentieth day, the two men stepped to the point where they had agreed ascent was most feasible.

At the foot of the wall Haines turned with troubled eyes and growled, "Say, Joe, won't you let me off this? If we kept on going there must be some break in the blasted wall."

"Did it seem that way from up there?" queried Elkins, shaking his head. And Haines could not deny but everywhere the towering battlements had appeared as an unbroken line of sheer precipice, not infrequently more lofty than the crest they stood on.

"Curse the hellish hole!" broke out Haines harshly. "It's bewitched! Just thirty feet of rope or hide would——" and then he was dumb as a light of immense wonder swept into his eyes. Then suddenly he was laughing, deeply and joyfully though almost noiselessly.

"What's the joke?" queried Elkins in surprize.

"If we ain't a couple of kids in white nighties!" cried Haines contemptuously though very contentedly. "Why, there's more line than we can use lying not ten minutes from us right now!"

"Line! Where?" snapped Elkins.

"Why, the underside of that great brute —isn't there many a thirty-foot length of hide on it?—strong enough I reckon to swing an elephant aloft," declared Haines.

"Well, I'm damned! Come on!" was all Elkins said at all printable.

"NEXT time we'll shin up and down a rope ladder," said Haines as he laid aside the knotted lengths of greasy rawhide with which they had just hauled up their gear from a ledge forty feet below them. "I ain't stuck on this human fly business—with maybe any minute a poke in the spine from some winged devil."

"I own the same notion gave me the cold shivers as we hung by our eyelashes on some of those ticklish places. Yes, I

guess next time we'll be fixed for a little straight talk with those hellish things," agreed Elkins very heartily as he stood watching the approaching night draw its dusky veil across the still forest-covered depths.

And then from afar there sped through the gloom a cry, so great, so bestial, so seeped in frightful emotion, that it seemed the whole universe must be listening aghast at the immensity of its virile ferocity and utter devilishness.

"The world in the making," muttered Elkins the scientist.

"A stick of dynamite will shut your warbling," growled Haines savagely; and then the two turned to seek their night's shelter.

FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

By H.P. LOVECRAFT

5. THE BELLS

Year after year I heard that faint, far ringing
  Of deep-toned bells on the black midnight wind;
Peals from no steeple I could ever find,
But strange, as if across some great void winging.
  I searched my dreams and memories for a clue,
And thought of all the chimes my visions carried;
Of quiet Innsmouth, where the white gulls tarried
  Around an ancient spire that once I knew.

Always perplexed I heard those far notes falling,
  Till one March night the bleak rain splashing cold
Beckoned me back through gateways of recalling
  To elder towers where the mad clappers tolled.
They tolled—but from the sunless tides that pour
Through sunken valleys on the sea's dead floor.

Tales of the Werewolf Clan

BY H. WARNER MUNN

2. The Master Fights

1. The Wreck of the Santa Ysabel

"The weather, though it is June, is as wild as December. No one remembers such a season. It is the more strange since we are on the business of the Lord, and some reason there must be for what has befallen us."

(Letter of Duke of Medina Sidonia to Philip II, King of Spain, from Corunna.)

"God caused the winds to blow and they were scattered!"

(Inscription on English medals, struck to commemorate the Armada's defeat.)

ALL day the shot-torn *Santa Ysabel* had wallowed down the Channel, her deck, ill-manned, a welter of corpses. Now as night drew on, the galleon, with her sister ships of the once great Armada, prepared to stand and fight.

The engagement was brief and deadly. Again the small craft of the harrying English outmaneuvered the unwieldy Spanish vessels. Again a raking discharge of chain shot and a hail of balls from sakers, falcons, and bastard culverins spread destruction along the three decks of the towering galleon. The scuppers ran red again at the discharge as though the fabric of the vessel itself was bleeding.

It was the year of our Lord, 1588. The day, August 9th, and the scene, the Battle of Gravelines.

It had been a running fight; Medina Sidonia had hoped till the last to connect with the Duke of Parma and to be reinforced, but fire-ships and gales had scattered his fleet and the deadly fire of

the swift English privateers had mowed down the soldiers on his unwieldy troop-ships until from being overmanned, the galleons were in danger of running ashore for lack of able hands.

Far from Parma, the Battle of Gravelines was in progress. The eagle formation which had been of such value in the Battle of Lepanto was still maintained. Heavy galleons for the body, lighter ones, including galleasses, for the wings, and troop-ships making up the tail of the fighting bird.

Against Hawkins—*Achines* the Spanish called him with revilings—and Drake —*El Draque,* or the Dragon—this clumsy formation had beaten along intact, save for the loss of here and there a straggler that lagged too far behind. Now the two powers were locked in the final battle of the ten days' flight. All that remained to fight were forty ships after the fire-ships had scattered the fleet; the greater part were far to leeward and driving toward the banks of Dunkirk.

The English fire went through and through the *Santa Ysabel,* when the cannons and culverins spoke, with force enough to shatter a rock. No ship had struck its colors, though the English fleet had lain yard-arm to yard-arm, and the Spaniards had endured five hours of being torn to pieces by cannon-shot.

At three hours before sunset the firing had blended into a continuous roar of sound. Deafened gunners served the small demi-culverins and falconets, which were all that remained of the *Santa Ysabel's* armament. From the maintop nothing could be made out through the smoke, but below in the pall, pinnace and barque drew near the galleon, discharged their broadsides and gave place to the next.

Here and there a Spanish fly-boat, a gunboat manned with oars, slid through the fighting, met a pinnace and sank it, but these now were very few.

There was no flinching on the decks of the *Santa Ysabel.* While the air shook with the roar of the artillery, priests went up and down under the hottest fire, crucifix in hand, confessing and absolving the dying.

To the patter of drum-beats and a cry of "Saint George for Merrie England!" a privateer drew close and lodged a volley in the galleon's hull. A hoarse cheer went up from dry throats when a coughing roar and a burst of white flame showed that the Spanish magazine had exploded.

Had it not been for the fact that the powder was nearly gone, that would have been the end of the *Santa Ysabel* at once, but although crippled she did not sink, drifting with fire showing through her ports and swathed in black clouds of smoke.

"Boarding party, away!" rang out from below, as the doughty little bark prepared to close with the giant, but before this could take place there came an interruption.

From behind the flaming galleon, a galleass, like a many-legged water-bug, came striding out in all its pomp of swinging oars and engaged the bark. Banners flew free and gay as they met, but a well-directed chain shot brought low the Spanish standard and a storm of balls felled the mainmast, along with a fallen sail that billowed over the rowing pit and which was straightway set aflame with a pot of wildfire.

A second volley crashed into the galleass between wind and water, and with a burst of bubbles and frenzied screams the craft heeled over and went down, taking with her soldiers, sailors and two hundred chained and helpless galley slaves.

This short and decisive battle had dis-

tracted the attention of the English from the *Santa Ysabel,* a mistake that was brought to their attention when their sails flapped uselessly beneath the mountainous side of the galleon.

Red-hot cannon-balls now fell from the heights into the hold of the bark and the galleon limped along after her consorts, still burning in isolated spots, but leaving the bark behind her; a pillar of fire which presently subsided into the cloud-darkened sea.

Before sunset the wind rose, the firing ceased, and the smoky canopy drifted away.

Far behind the mass of the Spanish fleet, the *Santa Ysabel's* condition was desperate. The soldiers, though few, outnumbered the seamen and snatched control, chose their own course and forced the pilot to steer where they pleased. The natural result was, that after a miserable night, spent in attending to the wounded, throwing overboard the dead and examining into the injuries of the vessel, they had lagged behind so far that the fleet was barely in sight.

There was no fresh water, and no powder save what was in the loaded guns on deck and a few muskets below. A hundred and four men walked the deck, haggard, desperate and hopeless. They were entering the North Sea, but at present were in water that was shoaling every moment, so that they could see the yellow foam where the waves broke on the banks. The English hung, menacing and grim, a mile on the weather quarter, but drawing more water than the galleon, they did not advance.

About noon, after prayers, the wind shifted to the southwest, and with the remaining rags of sail, the *Santa Ysabel* wore away from the shallows. The English followed as she plunged forward into the North Sea, but seemed satisfied to let the elements finish the work they had begun.

Two days later they passed the mouth of the Forth, and the dogging fleet turned back. No nearer the tatters of the Armada, the *Santa Ysabel* sailed on, her crew reduced by half.

A ghastly proof of the suffering and famine ahead in the fleet was given the followers in the morning. The mutilated galleon sailed on through the forenoon, through the carcasses of many hundreds of mules and horses that had been flung overboard in the night to save water for the men.

The *Santa Ysabel* kept up the forlorn pursuit, in a rising gale, as far as the Orkneys, passed those surf-lashed coasts in weather that steadily grew more wild, and fell in with two other galleons in as ill case as herself, learning from them that the fleet had separated, each vessel for itself. The three passed down the wild west coasts of the Hebrides, were scattered again in a furious storm, and with fourteen still living, the *Santa Ysabel* beat on toward Ireland.

The other two were splintered on the iron cliffs of Connaught and those of their crews that escaped the skenes and axes of the wild Irish, tempted by plunder, were shot or hanged on the spot by the English troops garrisoned there.

IT WAS night around the *Santa Ysabel.* Away to port, somewhere in the darkness, a flare of ruddy light lit up the surging clouds. Seconds after, a rumbling came sullenly over the dark water. Somewhere, a commander, rather than be taken or wrecked upon the inhospitable coast, had thrown a torch into his powder magazine and gone with all his dreams of conquest.

Leon Gunnar leaned on the four-foot-thick bulwark, famine-weakened and thirsty, wondering if those unknown dead

were happier in the sea or were more at rest than they had been before the crash of exploding powder had reft them of their earthly problems. The doubt, hanging in his mind, had kept him for days from ending his misery in the sea.

Long days and nights of dread, without hope, the galleon had driven along, fever delirium speaking in hellish screams and oaths from below. Leon was grateful that the ship was free from that horror at last.

Low in the water, a seam having opened a few hours before, the survivors floated toward the Irish coast. Leon debated incuriously the probable mode of his death. Would they sink, before they were smashed against the rocks of Sligo Bay? He hardly cared; the end was the same in either event, it seemed.

The officers had long been gone, and many of the crew had died in the hopeless struggle for home, died from sheer exhaustion and overwork. Four days, a mate had been captain of the galleon. For four days and nights he had not slept. On the morning of the fifth day, Leon recalled, the mate had looked red-eyed into the rising sun, had smiled mysteriously at some one he thought he saw there, and mounting the bulwark, had stepped open-armed toward the sunrise and the Friend whose name was—Death.

Far behind in the waste of tossing water shone a following light, twinkling, waving, unsteady as though it winked and signaled at the iron-bound lantern upon the *Santa Ysabel's* carved high poop.

Leon ran back, lifted the lantern and waved it from side to side. The thought of a following Spanish vessel was dispelled, when faint and dulled by distance came the sound of an English cheer above the slap and spatter of the driving spume along the high unwieldy stern.

Leon let the lantern fall into the sea and ran forward to where the weary men slaved at the pumps. Beaten by the howling wind and driving rain, they made all sail possible, and slid a trifle faster toward the deadly coast.

When morning came, it found the *Santa Ysabel* all but a derelict hulk, another mast carried away and only a rag of canvas giving steerage way. Terribly near and menacing spun a pursuing pinnace, a cockleshell of a boat, but filled with dauntless hearts. Its captain, too late to join the Gravelines battle, had sworn to turn back only as master of a galleon, and at last spied his long-sought quarry, but a quarter of a league away. Steadily the little *Vindictive* bore down upon the wallowing titan and an hour after sunrise opened fire. Her third shot, unanswered from the *Santa Ysabel,* smashed through the galleon's rudder and crippled her, like a hamstrung elephant.

The Spanish vessel swung about and lay in the trough of the seas, careening wildly, foam spurting over the stumps of masts.

The English howled and drew close. In the mêlée, a round shot had hulled the *Santa Ysabel,* adding a new menace to the surviving invaders. Through this rent, water poured into the hold from a myriad widening seams, now opened, now closed by the strain of the twisting seas.

The *Vindictive* drew alongside, and a sailor roped high on the single mast, with a dozen or more muskets beside him in the cask that did duty as a fighting-top, picked off one by one the sweating heart-sick Spaniards that manned the pumps. From different quarters of the deck, a spatter of shots answered, but none took effect, while the replying fire shortly ceased, for their powder at last was exhausted.

Suspecting a ruse, the pinnace sheered off, sending a chain shot screaming

through a yard, which fell, crushing two and hiding Leon Gunnar in a fold of canvas. He felt himself wrapped in a crushing tangle of cordage that bit and stung like steel whips; a bight of the cord tightened about his throat and short indeed was the painful pressure, for shots, cries, shrieking wind and booming seas melted together into a solemn bass organ note and silence and darkness shot with fire.

Again the English drove close, while the sailor at the masthead, in a wreath of smoke, swung a hissing missile about his head and hurled it upon the galleon's deck. The earthen pot of wildfire broke and let loose its devouring contents, which flamed blue and green but quickly sputtered out beneath a douche of sand wet with vinegar that had been prepared in expectation of such an attack.

Then, to the surprize of all, a quick shift of wind and a towering sea conspired together and smashed the *Vindictive,* all too near, against the rugged side of the *Santa Ysabel,* crushing in the weaker vessel.

A few of the English, clinging to the scrollwork, the gunports and the chains, made their way to the bulwarks. Rushing water dragged three of them away but five reached the Spanish deck.

Nine bloody haggard men, last of the *Santa Ysabel's* hundreds, battle insanity in their red-rimmed eyes, met them as they came. Dagger met dirk, a musket exploded; a Spaniard choked as the teeth of a dying Englishman met in his jugular. His heels drummed once or twice on the splintered deck, then only the slap of the waves was to be heard on the sinking galleon.

IT WAS night again, when a giant wave broke through a hole in the bulwarks, sloshed in and out of the scuppers and wet icily Gunnar's covering. Gasping for breath, and stung by the salt in a number of abrasions, the young man tore himself free with the help of his dirk.

Loose, he could see at once that the ship was far gone. It heaved and pitched lower in the water to the tune of rumbling below, as the wash of the deep currents in the hold carried empty barrels and floating cases to and fro. The tiller swung idly and the deck was strewn with bodies. Swiftly he examined all, but found no signs of life and consigned them to the seething waves.

A toy of the elements, the doomed *Santa Ysabel* careened in the choppy sea, a derelict hulk drifting near an inhospitable coast. The gale and rain had stopped, but clouds hid the moon from sight.

However, Leon had no need of moonlight to trace the outline of the shore. There, as far as eye could see, beacon fires flamed from horizon to horizon, like a glittering necklace of diamonds upon black velvet.

There also, men, wild Irish kerns, clothed in hide and raw meat eaters, danced about, armed with spiked poles, waiting for their fellow Christians to come tossing in, that they might slay and slay and slay, until the arm grew weary.

A light wind, rising again, was chill and cut through his soggy garments. Leon shivered and looked about for something to throw across his shoulders.

Near by, a black heap appeared to be a cloak flung haphazard over an overturned keg, but as he touched it a movement startled him and he drew back. Beneath the cloak crouched a little dark man!

Leon noticed that his eyes sparkled strangely as the fellow spoke and his teeth were long and sharp. His hair was gray and stringy upon his head, his eyebrows joined upon his forehead, forming a continuous bar of hair, lending him a wild and sinister appearance.

"Ah, friend, well met! We are alone at last!"

Leon harked back in his memory and found nothing there that recalled the presence of this man aboard the *Santa Ysabel*.

"No?" said the little man, as though in answer to Leon's silent question. "You have not seen me before, it is true, but I have been near to you all your life. I watched over you when you were born; during your youth and when you first planned to reach Scotland. Tell me, what is that about your neck?"

Leon felt a peculiar antipathy to this strange man and made surly answer. "If you know so much, you know that also." He eyed the stranger, coldly.

"Ey! Ey! That I do," the dwarf cackled. "Is it not a part of a certain key to a certain tomb in Blois? And are you not in search of its mate in Scotland?"

In spite of himself, Leon was surprized, but even this seemed to be the culmination of his long journeys. Curiously, he inspected the dark dwarf, but with recognition and no fear.

"I think I know you. You are the persecutor of my people. Arch-demon, *you* are the Master! You are here to prevent my success, I know. Have you come to kill me also?"

The Master nodded, a saturnine smile exposing his white fang-like teeth.

"It is your turn to go, unless you choose to live!"

Leon laughed.

"By daylight," he said, "the ship will strike upon the rocks and that will be the end of both of us. I do not believe that even you can escape such a sea. You can neither save nor harm me now!"

The Master drew himself up and faced into the wind, which had increased to a gale while they had been talking. Mumbling to himself, he performed odd gyrations with his arms, ending with palms pressing against the growing tempest in an attitude of command. The wind dropped, became a breeze and finally lessened to a mere puff of air.

Above, the clouds still raced along, but around the sinking galleon lay an area of utter peace and quiet where the waves were low, and no wind blew.

"Now do you doubt the Master's power?"

Gunnar shook his head.

"More I have done to bring you here. *I* aided your progress to Corunna and implanted in your mind the suggestion that you take ship there for England. *I* caused the storms to rise that sent the Armada to seek shelter in that port! My will alone has broken the sea-power of Spain! Delays, winds, niggardly equipment, *I* fomented them all! Because you were with the fleet, I had the power to smash the Armada and it is ruined forever.

"Poor, timorous Sidonia! Spain will blame him for the loss of sixty-five ships and twenty thousand men, but the Master met his fleet and fought on the side of the English, although they too are of the accursed race of men! The glory is the Master's and Sidonia will never meet Parma now!"

"What is it," Gunnar asked calmly, "that such a murderer wants with me?"

"Your body after death, to do with as it suits my pleasure, and with your consent!" answered the Master without hesitation. "If you will promise me to be my slave, I will save your life now and you shall have until the time of your natural death to live as you ordinarily would. I reserve this condition only, that if you call upon my help or visit that tomb in Blois, then you forfeit your days of life beyond thirty years from now!"

Gunnar made a rapid mental calculation. He had but just passed twenty-one. Death seemed certain in a few hours,

without some unforeseen aid. A sinking vessel lay beneath his feet, an unknown shore ahead that seemed alive with savages. Even then, he could hear their eery cries like lonely devils wandered far from their home in the pits. Across the heaving seas the sounds came faintly to him in the ominous unnatural silence around the galleon. The prospect was dismal. He shivered.

He might live sixty years in the normal course of life. Gunnar made, to himself, a solemn vow to keep away from France and to avoid ever calling upon the Master.

He turned to his enemy, who, smiling slyly, appeared to understand his decision.

"I promise," he said, "to serve you after my death and I acknowledge the conditions of the pact."

"So be it!" cried the little man and whistled through his hands.

Instantly the wind whooped through the shreds of rigging and the waves rose high again. But above the howling of the elements, Leon Gunnar heard, as he hurried for shelter, the high ululation of the Master's cackling laugh, and shivered again, but with more than cold.

Something within him warned that he had been a fool and queried with an inward jeering as to the meaning behind the promise he had made.

THE half-light which precedes morning finally came, and Leon, after a night of terrors in the demolished cabin, issued forth to see the Master, swathed in his long black cloak, leaning on the bulwark.

The Master smiled and beckoned him to approach.

"We are to be friends now, Gunnar," he said, with an underlying fierce humor. "What do you think of this?"

Leon caught his breath at the sight before him. They were very near a sandy beach, where broke a violent sea. Two galleons were pounding themselves to pieces among surrounding rocks. The forecastle of a third was jammed between rocks that held it partially together, although drenched and groaning in the seas that swept over it. Leon could see men upon the wreckage that waved pitifully at the *Santa Ysabel* as she lurched nearer as though their efforts could thrust her away.

The surf and beach were dotted with bodies and the Irish were down in hundreds, stripping the dead, knocking some of the living on the head and leaving others naked to perish of the cold.

Then, with a grinding crash, the *Santa Ysabel* drove into the wreckage and the remaining mast went by the board.

At the same time, the forecastle of the other galleon was swept from its perch and foundered.

Leon had no remembrance of swimming, but found himself on the shore among the howling men. He had a tight grasp of the Master's hand and the black cloak was about them both.

"Take care!" growled the Master. "They can not see you while you are with me. The cloak of invisibility protects us both."

Boats, an upturned tender, hatches, spars and cordage mingled with the dead upon the shingle.

As they passed along the edge of the water, a man came in upon a drifting scuttle-board, his leg badly bleeding from a blow by a spar in the surf. Leon recognized in him a Don Cuellar, commander of the *San Pedro;* a man for whose valor the younger man felt a deep admiration.

"Let us go along with him," he said to the Master and they followed.

A miserable figure, the Irish, who were plundering the well-dressed, took little

notice of him. He crawled along until he came to some rushes, where he lay and hid himself.

"He is safe there," said the Master; "we will see him again."

They passed on through the wreckage and entered a lane that led up toward the hills. Held close within the Master's cloak, Leon passed unseen within a few feet of the nearest fire and those who squabbled around it. The sound of their alien voices came faint to his ear as though they were far away.

A naked, wild-faced, hairy man ran toward him as he strode on beside the Master. The youth caught his breath, sure that he was seen, but the savage veered as he came near and rushed by, waving a bit of pointed stick, red and dripping; his hand bloody to the elbow.

They threaded their way through the cordon of fires. Near one, where the natives had dragged him, lay a naked graybeard, whom Leon recognized as the chief gunner of the *Rata Coronada*. As they approached, he seemed to sense the coming of a compatriot and raised himself on an elbow, feebly croaking *"Agua! Agua!"* from salt-cracked lips.

A virago, tending a pot, struck him down with a heavy iron ladle, so that he fell across the feet of one who appeared to be some sort of a sub-chief, as he wore a pair of tight-fitting knee-breeches and a goatskin jacket open in front. This man snarled and kicked the gunner's body away.

The Spaniard cried out, as his hair began to burn, for he lay now upon glowing embers.

The sub-chief seized a large rock and coolly, as though it was a matter of familiar practise, beat out the brains of the tortured gunner.

Leon's soul seemed to turn steel within him at the horrible sight. Freeing his dirk with his right hand and clutching the Master's scraggy wrist with his left, they leapt toward the fire. As they neared the light of the flames, the Master stopped, seemingly in pain. Leon stared in wonder, then left his protection, raced to the fire and sprang like a cat upon the back of the murderer.

It was a second's work to yank the shaggy head back and draw his keen blade across that bronzed bull-throat!

The throng shouted at this tattered, sea-soaked apparition that had materialized before them, out of nothing. Blood spurted hissing on the flames and the sub-chief fell without a cry into the fire across the body of his victim.

The pot overturned and sent a flood of scalding broth over the old hag, and in the excitement and confusion Leon ran back several steps into the shadows, and by the Master's side, invisible to all but him, they were both again unseen.

The Master laughed for the third time. This was a protegé much to his liking. Hand in hand, Master and pupil marched inland from the coast.

Because of the Gunnars, the Master had crossed the Channel. A new hunting-ground was before him, and the first kill was satisfying to the enemy of all things human.

He was still laughing softly to himself when the sun rose beyond the hills.

Leon was suddenly aware that he was again alone. With the first ray of sunlight, the Master had vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared aboard the wrecked galleon.

2. *The Bug-Wolves of Castle Manglana*

ON THE battlements of Castle Manglana, Leon Gunnar stood, leaning on a musket and gazing pensively across the deep placid waters of Lough Erne.

It was late in October, in the year of our Lord, 1588.

Manglana stood on a promontory projecting far out into the broad lake, whose ripples lapped against the base of the castle wall.

No boats plied Lough Erne; all had been sunk a week before, when O'Rourke, the owner of the castle, had retreated with his family and retainers into the mountains, leaving Gunnar and eight other Spaniards to defend themselves as best they might against a force of eighteen hundred English soldiers. These had been collected in Dublin and were led by Ireland's Lord Deputy, whose orders were to scour the West country and kill all fugitives from the thirteen galleons which were wrecked upon that part of the coast.

A swallow skimmed by and left a trail of widening circles on the still water. Leon sighed and followed it with his eyes, wishing that he too had wings with which to leave this wild land far behind. How soon would he flee to Scotland and his kindred there!

A crack of a musket and a jubilant yell broke into his revery and he turned to see a bearded man, dressed in the saffron mantle of an Irish gallowglass, dancing about the battlements.

"By'r Lady," he shouted, "I got the dirty spy that time! See him kicking in the marsh?"

"Well done, Cuellar!" Leon applauded, "we can't waste ammunition. Every shot must find an English heart!"

Cuellar became serious and looked around to see if any one was listening.

"Boy!" he whispered, "you don't know how true that is. I was prowling about in the powder room today and I found that three of those powder kegs O'Rourke left us were some that had been picked up on the beaches after the wrecks!"

"Well?" queried Gunnar.

"No! Ill! Water soaked in somehow. We've got a half-keg left and a dozen muskets to fight an army with. Señora Cuellar will be finding another man, I'm afraid."

"Don't feel low," Leon urged. "Keep up your spirits, sir. Time is fighting for us too, you know. The English don't know our strength, and a couple of heavy rains will drown them out."

He pointed toward the landward side of the promontory. Far enough from the castle so that musket fire could not reach the defenders, lay the camp of the English, on such high ground as existed in the low swampland. Now and then some foolhardy soldier would leave the camp and try to find a way through the swamps and effect an entrance into the castle, but after the first few attacks in force had ended in disorder and bloody defeat, the English had sat down in their camps and commenced a policy of waiting until starvation drove the Spaniards into their hands.

With food for two months this did not disturb the besieged greatly, but the failing supply of powder was an event of the first importance. Once the English learned that a man might penetrate to the castle walls without being fired upon, others would follow.

"Ah, Gunnar," answered Cuellar, "you don't understand the feelings of a father. All of us here have got families waiting for us, but you. When you watch your own children growing up and see the look in their mother's eyes, you won't feel like waiting for some other man to step into your boots! Almost a year, we've been away, and no one home knows that we still live, or where!

"You came ashore on that galleon that smashed into mine on the rocks of Sligo Bay, you said. Do you remember that burned monastery and the twelve Spaniards hanging dead from the rafters in the nave? But for God's grace we might have dangled there."

Leon nodded vigorously. "And the blessed saints all tumbled on the ground beneath their feet! Almighty! I can see them yet!"

"It was horrible!" agreed Cuellar; "and only a miracle could have saved us from those madmen that plundered the wrecks. I shall remember in my prayers for ever the chief that saved my life."

Leon spoke up bitterly.

"You don't think he did it because he loves Spaniards, do you? He hates England as he does hellfire and only gave us shelter because we are enemies of the English. If he had cared anything about us, he would have helped us get back home instead of leaving us here."

"True," agreed Cuellar, "but we are alive and it was a blessed miracle that allowed us to reach his protection!"

He crossed himself fervently, and Gunnar, in disgust, returned to his post of duty on the eastern wall.

Only too well, Leon knew that the saints had had nothing to do with the bringing of himself, Cuellar and a young naval officer to the dubious protection of Castle Manglana. An unseen companion had journeyed with the three; one powerful to protect those whom he wished against *any* foe! And he, a dread enemy of mankind, was self-called—the Master!

CUELLAR shouted down the stairway to some one below.

"Gomez, tell Ramon to bring up another flask of powder and three more muskets. Send up Diego, Enrique and Rodriguez. I think those English frogs are going to come paddling out here again!"

Gunnar ran back across the flat roof again. It was true that an odd commotion was taking place in the camp, hardly perceptible in the growing dusk.

Then, far across the flat marshes, arose a puff of white smoke; an eery whistle rose to a scream which steadily mounted, passed overhead, and a heavy missile plunged sullenly into the lake.

The echoes were still in flight between the cliffs of Lough Erne, when a thud shook the castle and both Gunnar and Cuellar felt a slight sensation of giddiness as though the firm structure rocked beneath them. A dismal wail came from below and the two watchers gazed into each other's eyes with dawning comprehension and fear.

A man staggered up the stairs and came out on the roof. His hair was crisped and smoking, the beard gone from one side of his face, and sparks ran to and fro on his charred clothing. He saw Cuellar and came straight toward him, saluting the tacitly recognized leader of the garrison.

"*Madre de Dios,* Gomez, speak!" Cuellar cried. "What has happened?"

"Ramon," said the man, with difficulty, his eyes rolling as he choked, "went—into—the magazine—with—a lighted torch——!" and he fell, still at the position of salute, across Cuellar's feet.

"That finishes us." Cuellar looked at Leon. "The English have dragged a cannon up at last, and now our powder is gone!"

Leon thrust a hand inside the fallen man's goatskin jacket.

"Sir, Gomez is dead," he announced.

"I expected that," came the hopeless reply. "Come, let us see how many yet live."

As the two left the roof, another distant report sounded from the camp and Gunnar turned back.

"Go. I will watch here, and call if there is an attack."

"Very well," replied Cuellar. "*Adios,* friend. This is the end!" And he disappeared in the billows of smoke pouring up the stairway.

"It is *not* the end!" murmured an unctuous voice in Gunnar's ear.

He recognized the voice at once. The Master was making his usual nightly visit, whenever Gunnar was alone.

"Are you utterly merciless?" Gunnar burst out, passionately. "Is there no pity, no humanity in you? Beast! Fiend! Devil! You disgrace the name of man! You are a monster! In the name of every holy saint, I plead with you to leave me and let me die in peace!"

A cold ferocity gleamed for a second in the Master's eyes.

"Do not be misled by the body I happen to wear just now! I have other semblances that might surprize you! I am *not* a man and neither am I a beast. You will soon learn that I am not human! As for mercy and pity, I had them long ago, but they were stolen from me. However, I did not come to tell you this, but to show you a way out and perhaps to help those who are with you."

Gunnar's face lighted and he took a step closer to the odd creature who held him in his power, by a pact of servitude, pledged aboard a sinking galleon earlier in the year.

"What is it?" he urged. "Tell me quickly!"

"Did you know that tonight is Hallowe'en? The one night in all the year, next to Walpurgis night, when it is easiest for a man to become a wolf from sunset to sunrise?"

Gunnar chuckled. "You may have wonderful powers and I admit that you can make yourself invisible and can lull storms, but no man can become a wolf! That is only an Irish and French superstition."

"As I have already told you, I am *not* a man. You are too ignorant to understand what I am. If you had traveled more you would know that what you term a superstition has been known and believed in all countries and all ages. *I*, the Master, am the one who began that knowledge upon this earth! Strip off your clothes and we will see what can be done on Hallowe'en night!"

Gunnar hesitated and the Master urged him sternly. "Strip!" he again commanded, and the Spaniard, without moving his eyes from that twisted face, began to do as he was told.

The red eyes of the Master fixed the young man like stone, as he moved nearer.

"I am giving you a choice," he said slowly. "I promised you, upon the *Santa Ysabel*, your full term of life if you bound yourself to me after death and but thirty years if you found it necessary to call upon my help. Choose now, if you are willing to become a *thing* that will scatter the English from their camp like leaves before the blast! If you will it so, I shall cause such storms to arise tomorrow that they will flood the marshes and save the lives of your friends. If not—you can see them die tomorrow when the soldiers take the castle, and be saved by me, knowing all your life that you could have rescued your friends and would not!"

Leon Gunnar considered. He had no one to care for, or to care if he lived or died. Thirty years of life, at least, lay before him according to the pact, in which something might arise that would defeat the Master's plans. Then, too, here was a promise that the lives of Cuellar and the rest would be spared. Señora Cuellar—the children—Spain and love—and sunshine in weary hearts!

"I wish to fight and I ask your help," he replied.

"Thirty years then, my lad," clucked the black dwarf and stooped his head over Gunnar's arm.

The young man felt a sharp pain in the hollow of his elbow. The Master

backed away and threw an evil-smelling liquid upon him, muttering a low incantation as he did so.

Then—agony unspeakable, as though every bone in the Spaniard's body had been violently wrenched from its socket and as violently reset!

He fell to the roof, crying out in pain. Was it fancy or truth that the cries sounded like yelps and howls instead of words? His nose seemed strangely long; in fact, it was no longer a nose, but a snout, and rolling there, his hands came within his vision and he howled again. They were not hands—they were (could it be possible?) the hairy paws of a wolf!

He felt a kick in the ribs. The dwarf seemed very wroth.

"Be quiet, you fool! You will have the others here! Watch now."

The Master drew his black cloak tight about himself and leaned far forward. Gunnar meant to gasp, but it sounded like a low whine of surprize, when he saw that suddenly the black cloak was no longer cloth, but black hair!

Then the Master fell forward, his scrawny limbs shrinking, his face changing frightfully, and *two* tailless wolves stood side by side upon the roof of Castle Manglana.

Gunnar felt a strange wild thrill in his veins. He seemed to have imbibed something of the Master's proud, alien spirit. He was no longer human, but a beast and felt as a wild predatory animal should.

Man was his enemy: should he not kill? Below, in the castle, were men!

He stalked, stiff-legged, over to the open entrance. His hackles lifted and foam drooled from his avid jaws. Man smell here was strong! He took one step forward and howled long and dismally.

He would have hurled himself down at his former friends, had not a chill command halted him and he stood still, trembling violently.

There was nothing left of his former life. Now he was but a machine meant for one purpose only, and that purpose was to kill as long as he was able to fight. In his mind surged the red tide of murder.

The black wolf was regarding him with grim humor. "You will do," he announced, and the words made themselves felt without sound in the gray wolf's brain. "More men are over here. Follow me!"

THE black beast loped across the roof and sprang over a low opening in the battlements. Into the lake the gray wolf plunged after the leader and struck out for shore.

By the time they reached it, the sky was covered with clouds, mysteriously having appeared where ten moments earlier not one was to be seen.

The beasts sank belly-deep in the ooze and struggled to a firmer footing. There was a musty smell from green-scummed pools filled with rotting leaves and small dead things. A drizzling rain spat and hissed in the slimy water.

"This will keep our prey under shelter," thought the gray wolf and the black bent his head as though words had been uttered. They loped into the shallows, swam a bit and waded into sucking mud. Beyond, lay the camp.

Cautiously they skirted the edges. A sentry approached, and leaving the gray behind, the black wolf sneaked forward, gathered his legs beneath him and his wiry muscles tensed.

A leap, a stifled sob, then a splash in the puddles and the man was down, with his throat opened wide and bubbling.

Another sentry approached, peering about for the source of the faint noises, and the gray wolf sprang. Then both,

muzzles dabbled red, slunk into the sleeping and defenseless camp.

As the gray had supposed, no one was visible. In their quarters, some slept and others dozed, but over all lay quiet and a patter of rain that hushed any possible sound of velvet footfalls.

Near the cannon, the black wolf stopped, sent out a silent command, and the gray prowled, watchful, alert to protect, while the Master assumed the human form once more. An instant he busied himself there; then again two misshapen tailless wolf-things trotted on into the camp.

A brush and canvas shelter lay a little apart from the others, and from it came stertorous snores. An instant of hesitation and both wolves entered the low doorway. When they came out again, the snoring had stopped.

The eyes of both gleamed with a strange exhilaration as they separated.

The black took one line of shelters and the gray wolf commenced dipping in and out of another line, leaving a trail of red drops on the wet ground to mark where he had passed. Behind them lay a quiet that would never again be broken by the occupants of the shelters they had visited.

This dreadful business went on for a long time, without interruption. The black wolf had finished two lines of shelters and was half-way along with a third, while the gray was slaughtering, joyously drunk with killing, on his second line, when a man awoke from frightful dreams to look into slavering jaws and find a more horrid reality there.

He had just time to cry out, "Warewoolfes!" before his spine cracked in those iron jaws. The other occupant of the shelter roused and yelled something incoherent, and also died.

At once there was commotion, men running about without aim or purpose, looking for an enemy band of raiders; not realizing what they were to fight until they saw the two beasts, oddly high in the hind quarters, leaping in and out of the lines of shelters.

An Irish renegade guide, with the troop, fell on his knees at the sight. Demons!" he howled. "The bugs! The bugs! The bug-wolves are after us!" And went crawling away toward the cannon, on hands and knees through the mud.

The cry of "Bug-wolves" went racing through the camp, adding to the general terror of the troops to whom the country tales of men-beasts were speedily being brought home.

And all the while, the two wolves, making the most of the confusion, were leaping swiftly about, pulling down one here and another there and worrying him to death, snarling like mad things. Heads down and dodging blows, they finally dashed through the center of camp, toward the castle again. On a little rise of ground, they stopped, plain against the lighter sky and directly in line of fire of the cannon.

The Irish guide, breathing a hurried prayer that the cannon was loaded, depressed the muzzle and surrounded by a frantic crowd of soldiers, ignited the charge.

The mighty concussion that followed shook the camp. A lurid flash of light lit up the billowing clouds overhead, fragments of iron and mangled bodies flew everywhere, and in Castle Manglana six men looked at one another with surprize in their eyes, not daring to hope that the missing man had found a way to help them.

The flimsy shelters were down in many places and when the deafened survivors of the explosion thought of the two wolves again, the rise of ground was bare.

A rising wind now brought a downpour of rain, a steady fall that brought the surface of Lough Erne lapping over

the marshlands at the base of the promontory and still continued. Before morning, Castle Manglana would be upon an island and the rain which would follow for days would prove sufficient to render the position of the English untenable before another cannon could be secured.

Cuellar and five other Spaniards were to see their homes at last.

Miles away, the Master stood wrapped in his black cloak. A gray wolf crouched at his feet.

"That way," said the somber dwarf, "lies Antrim. From there you can easily reach Scotland. I have told you where to find your surviving relative, and I am very sure you will like her. Run now and get as far as you can before morning. Take the clothes of the first man you meet an hour before dawn.

"What caused the cannon to blow up? I put in an extra charge of powder, and filled the muzzle with mud! Good-bye, Leon Gunnar, you are a worthy slave."

A second later the gray wolf was alone. He did not hesitate, but turned in the direction the Master had indicated.

Señora Cuellar would some day see her man again, and never know that an unknown friendless wanderer had given years of his life that six men with families might be together again. Nor, had she known, would she have believed.

But he, who had sacrificed to save others, was loping on through the night toward Antrim and Scotland in desperate haste.

In the morning he would be a naked man, never again to know the unholy power and desires of this one red night.

3. In the Tomb of the Bishop

WHEN the tomb was new and the smell of freshly cut stone still hung about the rock that formed it, men came with sad faces and walking slowly, and placed therein a man who they supposed was finished with walking and the other trivial matters that interest the living.

After the proper ceremonies had been observed they shut and locked the massive iron door, and leaving the poor dead thing there, they went their several ways and thought but little of the remains of one who had but lately been held in high respect.

For a while on anniversaries, those who had loved the bishop came and placed flowers there and wept a little for all the hopes and fears that they were burdened with, and being comforted within themselves they went away again.

And all the while the great iron key hung in a secret place in the ancestral castle of the Gunnars, and it was the only one that would fit the intricate lock that fastened the tomb of the bishop.

And all the while, the Worm, who is lord of us all, went to and fro within the tomb and fed in his own manner and was filled and well content.

And the soul of the bishop basked in the mellow light of Paradise, caring no more for his body or its future than we for a shoe that has been outworn and cast aside.

One by one, those that had known the bishop ceased to visit the tomb, and passing from the places that had known them well, also joined him again and were content.

And the Worm, who is lord of us all, finding nothing to keep him longer there, left the bones of the bishop in silence and darkness and peace.

Lichens and mosses and vines grew over the gray stones and rust flaked thickly red in the hinges of the iron door.

And in the secret place where hung the key, a great fat spider lived out her life and was not disturbed.

In the tomb of the bishop, time was of

little account, but outside a hundred years went by and brought changes that were inevitable and to be expected.

One night, men came to that tomb in desperate haste, casting glances behind them as though they were sorely afraid, and when they placed a key in the lock and it would not turn, they panted as though they had been running far and had yet far to go by morning.

And they tried yet another key and another and the lock would not turn, and despair came upon them, for it was very important that the tomb should be opened.

At last, the youngest of the men came across the garden and in his hand was the old key and behind him inside the ancient castle of the Gunnars, which was burning with a great crackling and a vast amount of light, an old fat she-spider cursed that man with all the power of a spider's curse, for he had taken away a home that to her line had been far more ancient and hallowed than any place can be to men.

It took four men to open that rusty door, and they did not remain long inside, but placed a parcel well wrapped and protected against the damp, upon the casket where lay the bishop's dry and aged bones.

In the parcel was a book, whose pages were made of human skin, and which told a story which was grim and horrible and a little sad.

And they left it there, where they thought it to be safe, and separated and went to far countries and saw one another no more till the day after their deaths, when some of them were reunited.

And behind them, rust gathered again in the hinges of the door, and the lichens and mosses and all the green vines gathered more thickly still upon the stones that formed the tomb of the bishop.

But the key had been cut into two pieces and one of the men had taken one half and his younger brother had taken the other, and the movements of that last half have been told elsewhere at some length.

Over the tomb of the bishop crawled another hundred years, but if you had chanced to enter, you would have noticed perhaps that there was now a feeling within that some one else was present. Perhaps if you had laid your ear very close to the casket where the book lay, you would have heard a faint rustling inside that sounded like a very small mouse that could not or would not be quiet. And then you would have left, I am sure.

Two men walked in the old Gunnar park and came to the garden, long grown over with weeds.

One was an old man apparently, but his wrinkles and white hair came from an inward trouble and not from the pitiless claws of Time.

The other, obviously the son of the first mentioned, was but just come at his maturity. There was a look in his young eyes that spoke of evil things that no man should know and live, lest the rest of the world should find cause to regret after it was too late to prevent knowledge from becoming unspeakable action.

Leon Gunnar had married in Scotland, apprenticed his only son to a warlock sorcerer in the hope that the resultant learning would provide a way to fight the black Master to whom he had bound himself, and now with but a day remaining of the thirty years that he had been allowed by the pact to which he had agreed, had come with his son after the book which had something in it that the younger man must know.

In a thicket, a monstrosity gloated and hugged itself and chattered in a voice more shrill than any bat as it watched the culmination of a long-planned revenge.

It was close when they unlocked the door with a shining new key made from the pattern of the split and rusty one. Its voice was so high that the older man could not hear it at all as they pried back the aged door with all their strength and short iron bars. The senses of the young warlock were made keen by his training and he stopped his work to listen, but the Master was more cunning than he and made no more noises.

It was alert and waiting for its chance when they entered the tomb of the bishop and saw there upon the rotten old casket what they had long desired.

It was watching when the younger man came out of the tomb with the precious book in his arms, and it tittered nervously when Leon Gunnar thought he heard a noise inside the old casket and turned back to listen.

The young Scottish warlock was on his knees in the weeds tearing off the coverings from the old book when he heard a tiny noise behind him. He looked back.

The door that had almost defied the combined strength of two strong men was closing by itself, without a creak or rasp from the rust-eaten hinges.

From inside the tomb came a scream that held all the terror imaginable to the mind of man!

The young man cried out, "Father!" in agony of spirit, and reached for the edge of the door.

A mist swirled before him there, out of which stared two red, burning eyes. Without a sound, he dropped in his tracks and the door closed.

Inside, Leon Gunnar had seen, before the tomb went dark, the old wooden casket crumble into dust. It was at the sight of the horror that sat upright in that heap of punk, its jaws clicking and its bony arms reaching out for him, that he had screamed!

It was then he knew that his thirty years of life had come to an end.

* * * * * * *

After a long while the iron door opened and a third individual appeared in the opening. About four feet in height, the Master was wrapped from head to foot in a cloak of black that hid all of his form except his glittering eyes. In them lurked a suspicion of moisture, as he looked upon the interior of the tomb where bits of dry hard bones mingled with scraps of tattered flesh.

Could it be possible that the Master felt regret for the end he had plotted?

Had the young warlock not been unconscious outside that place of sudden and frightful death, and had he heard the Master's low soliloquy, any impression of this nature would have been confirmed.

"I have been a fool," said the Master to himself, "and I have made one of my few mistakes. I gave only a will to tear and mangle, to that heap of dry bones! I *should* have instructed it to save enough of the body intact, so that I could use it. There is nothing here of value to me!"

He directed his piercing gaze into a corner of the dark chamber.

"You have won, Gunnar, through no wisdom of yours. Our past is ended and you are free. Your boy I shall allow to return to Scotland when he awakes to learn more magic. I will meet him again when he is worth fighting! Leon Gunnar, take your freedom!"

Something shot by the Master and out of the door, with the zip of an arrow, audible only to the black dwarf's senses.

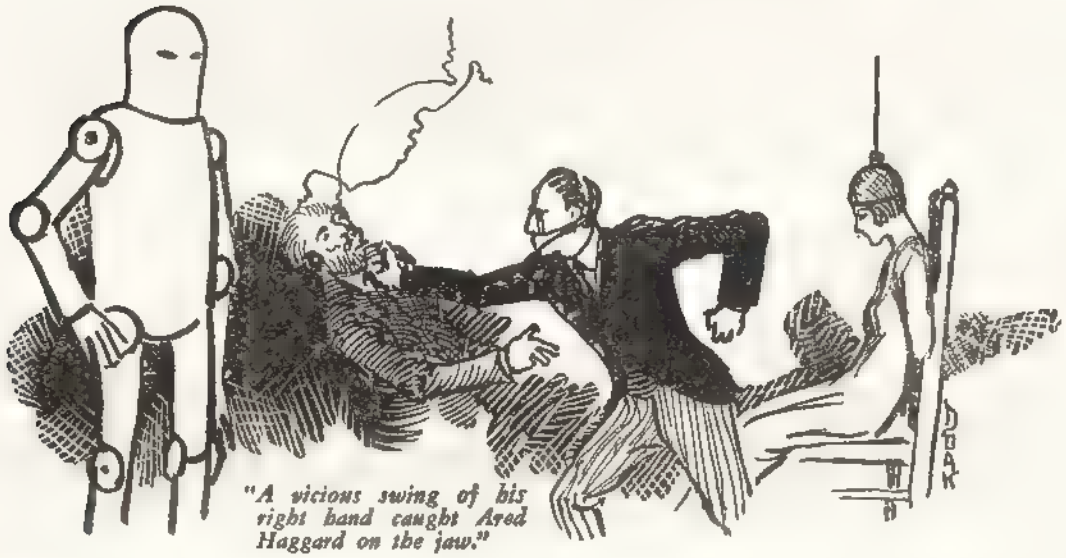
Slowly, he closed the iron door and

turned the key. The vines fell into place again and there was silence and darkness and peace in the hidden tomb of the forgotten bishop.

And the Worm, who is lord of us all, came in the night and found that therein which made him merry, but the young warlock was far away, with the book of ill omen, and no one knows where the Master went, in deep regret.

MEN OF STEEL

By AINSLEE JENKINS



"A vicious swing of his right hand caught Ared Haggard on the jaw."

I STILL remember, above all else, Ared Haggard's smile.

That, you might think, is not unusual. But when you have heard this fantastic tale to its end — and set me down, perhaps, for a weak-witted creature whose mind the brooding desert has turned—you will wonder that it is the smile I recall so distinctly.

You, however, never saw Ared Haggard smile.

Picture a long, blankly white face, etched over with a hundred intercrossing lines. A thin prow of a nose, and on either side of it two deeply imbedded, low-lidded eyes. A fat, sensual underlip, its color the livid purple of a fresh bruise, contrasting oddly with the lean, twisted upper one. A straight chin, with the black bristles of a harsh beard.

The lips, though, were the things that wrought Ared Haggard's smile, and it is that twitching smile, planted undyingly in my memory, which bids me set down this story.

On the lonely reaches of the great Mojave Desert you can not pick and choose amongst your neighbors; to the contrary, you must be thankful if you even have one. Ared Haggard was mine. And

though from the very first some wary sixth sense warned me that here was a man dangerously different from all others, I welcomed his presence and did my best, through fairly frequent visits, to cultivate and strengthen our friendship.

He was, I gathered, comparatively wealthy and thus able to humor his slightest whim. An eccentric, certainly. Otherwise why had he purchased the rambling, grotesque castle he lived in? "Miner's Folly," they called the place, and a folly it definitely was. Years ago some pick-and-panner had struck it rich, and, as many of them do in similar cases, built for himself this huge castle, set just below the cadaverous ribs of one of the Mojave's barren mountain ranges. The structure had been lonely and deserted for years when Ared Haggard chanced upon it. Evidently it had appealed to him, for he'd purchased it and converted it to his own obscure purposes, as I've said.

This particular evening I had felt the need of some type of conversation, no matter how morbid — as Haggard's usually was—and had accordingly paced the three miles which separated my little shack and "Miner's Folly." Hundreds of yards off I'd heard the baying of his gaunt wolf-hound which always heralded my approach, and Haggard was standing under the raised portcullis of the doorway when I trudged up. Portcullis? Yes. That miner had followed the plan of a mediæval castle to the smallest detail!

Even in the fast-thickening gloom I could detect a change in the man's manner. And when I came closer I saw that his eyes were burningly alive, restless, even eager. He stretched out his bony hands and grasped my shoulders and then actually slapped me on the back. Never before had I been granted such a greeting.

"I'm glad, Wells," his harsh, impatient voice told me, "that you've come over tonight. I want somebody to talk to; I was even thinking of going over to fetch you. But come inside, and let old Tom give you a glass of my very particular port wine. The occasion needs some celebrating!"

"Occasion?" I said, puzzled. "What occasion?"

But he only shook his head and led me into the high-raftered main room of his castle.

As far as I was concerned, it might have been the only room of the place, for I'd never been through any of the others. There were others, of course, but the tall, bolt-studded doors which led to them were forever closed, and Haggard simply didn't hear me whenever I'd suggested inspecting them. I'll admit that this silent refusal had put an edge to my curiosity; often I'd laughingly accused him of being a second Bluebeard, with his dread secrets locked up in those mysterious rooms. "Some night," he once said, "I'll show you them. . . ."

Was this, I wondered, to be the night?

WHEN we were seated in the squat leather chairs which Haggard favored, old Tom, true to his master's word, brought us glasses of a rich port wine, and we both lit cigarettes. Old Tom was Haggard's lone servant, a tall, dark Navajo Indian. Some affliction had rendered him dumb, though he could hear very well, and this fortunate combination made him, in my opinion, the perfect menial.

Haggard's white face seemed to be hanging suspended before me in the half-light; he had drained the drink with a gulp and was I could see, itching to speak.

"Well," I began, to start him off, "why so anxious to have me over tonight, Haggard?"

He leaned forward and his eyes, with their pin-points of flame, ran over my

whole body. I felt curiously naked under that concentrated stare. I laughed somewhat uneasily and repeated the question.

"You've wondered, I suppose, Wells," he rasped finally, "why I live up here as I do. A hellish life, eh? No reason for it. You, of course, write, and stick yourself away in the desert because of its solitude. But I—ah, why have I secluded myself in this crazy castle? A mystery, isn't it?" He chuckled delightedly.

I said hurriedly: "Of course I have conjectured sometimes about your purpose in coming up here. I supposed that you were sick, as I was, of the noise and brawl of the city. Or perhaps it's your health?"

"Not," he murmured, "my health. Oh no, no! But I'll tell you this, Wells: the desert's a marvelous place for more things than writing. . . ."

"You've got a hobby, then?" I asked.

The question had a peculiar effect on him. His lips positively writhed, and the uneven rows of his yellowish teeth showed through in a ghastly smile. Smile! It shouldn't be called a smile. A smile is warm and human and friendly. Haggard's might have been friendly, but human—it wasn't human.

At that moment I was downright afraid of him.

"A hobby," he said slowly. "You can call it that, Wells, if you like. Yes, I have a hobby. So did Edison have a hobby, and Steinmetz, and thousands before them. Thousands of whom the average man's never heard, thousands who followed their calling in the ignorant, superstition-ridden Middle Ages, when the slightest rumor about them meant a horrible, torturous death. Those men—the astrologers, alchemists, *scientists* of mediæval times—are my heroes, Wells. And to them I've dedicated—my hobby."

Strange, uncanny talk in the wavering gloom of that fantastic desert castle, with the night wind moaning through the sage and sand outside!

"Then," I said, essaying a nervous little laugh, "it's your hobby that you keep concealed behind those mysterious doors!"

He nodded his lank head. There certainly seemed to be a fascination for him in running his prying eyes over my body; he did it constantly. "Yes," he muttered, "behind those doors. I intended, at first, to take you through them tonight, but now I think I'll reserve that pleasure for you till the final, triumphant instant. Then it'll be twice the thrill it would be now. Oh, you're fortunate, Wells, you're fortunate! You've got the experience of a lifetime coming to you!"

"The experience," I repeated, "of a lifetime?"

"Yes!" He wagged his head gleefully. "A thing to remember to your dying day!"

He suddenly fell silent, as if brooding. Then he peered up at me. "I just recalled it," he said. "Didn't you say something about your fiancée coming to see you?"

I smiled. I always smiled when I thought of Jean Erskine. We'd been engaged for I don't know how long, waiting till I could afford our marriage. Jean told me repeatedly I was a stilted fool not to accept, for a while, her comfortable income; but I couldn't abide the thought of it. You know the feeling.

"Yes," I confirmed. "She's going to spend a couple of days here. No scandal, Haggard! You needn't be afraid of anything—er—improper. I assure we don't need a chaperone."

He laughed. "I'll accept your word. When does she arrive?"

"Let's see," I figured. "Today's Monday. Two days from now, on Thursday."

"M-m-m. Bring her over Thursday night, Wells. I think she'd get a thrill

too out of what's behind those locked doors you're so curious about."

I overlooked the commanding tone of his invitation; Haggard was like that.

"Can't you give me an inkling of its nature?" I asked. "Nothing that'll upset her, is it?"

Again that contortion of his lips. "Oh, no! I wouldn't ask her otherwise. You may rest assured of that, Wells . . . but more I won't tell you. I want the glory, the magnificence, the triumph of it to take you by surprize. I want — but enough. I'll say no more. Thursday night you will be admitted to the secret of secrets, the most splendid achievement ever consummated by man, the ultimate conquest of mind over matter!"

His tone had risen to that of a fanatic. His sunken eyes streamed fire; his gaunt face was alight; his hurtling words boomed challengingly through the vasty hall; for the moment I was forgotten; Haggard's mind, I am convinced, had soared to an immortal realm. Once more I felt a tingling shiver scamper up my spine, and I told myself that Jean and I would keep away from "Miner's Folly" on Thursday night. . . .

But curiosity is, with love and hunger, the great impelling force of life, and it was my damnable curiosity that conquered my dread and brought me back to that cursed house on Thursday night.

Soon after, I left. Ared Haggard had slumped down in his chair; he did not even rise to see me to the door. I stole out, and the romping gust of the icy, sage-spiced wind drove from my head the queer words and half hinted at thoughts I had heard. I walked slowly, revelling in the deep, clear purple of the desert night, listening to the crooned symphony of breeze and sage and sand, shot through occasionally with the far-away whining yap of a slinking coyote.

MY OWN house is a rude hut of three flimsy rooms. The door has no lock; you do not need one on the desert. I strode zestfully up to it, shoved it open, stepped in — and was immediately conscious that there was some one in the house.

No electric light, of course. I fumbled with a match, struck it. And in the quick, wavering flare I saw him.

Who?

Old Tom, Haggard's Navajo servant!

He was standing there impassively, awaiting me. I muffled an ejaculation of surprize and lit a lamp. Then I turned to him, the obvious question on my lips.

"What's wrong?"

He gestured for pencil and paper, his only way of communication. I found them, and watched him scrawl three shaky words on the white typewriter sheet.

"I—am—afraid."

His dumb, peculiarly dog-like eyes rested on me as I read his message. I glanced up and jerked:

"Of what?"

He shook his head; his brown, gnarled old face wore an expression of puzzlement tinged with fear.

"Write it down," I commanded. "What are you afraid of?"

He took some time over his next sentence; writing was a great labor to him. But finally it lay before me, and I scanned it with a feeling of unreality.

"I—am—afraid—of—Mister—Haggard."

I laughed. What else could I do? Then the memory of Haggard's wild, flaming eyes and wisted smile came upon me, and I fell silent and asked him, more soberly:

"Why?"

I did not like to read the words he put down in reply; but they were there, more ominous and chilling than if they'd been spoken.

"He—is mad."

There was a sudden surge of wind, and the door rattled on its hinges. Almost I expected to see it swing open and reveal Haggard, piercing us with his devilish eyes. I dragged it back and stared outside; but there was nothing except the ghostly stretch of the desert and the crinkled, outflung shadow of a joshua tree.

"What makes you think he's mad, Tom?"

His painful writing answered:

"He works—on a—great machine. He—looks—at me—with eyes—of—madness."

I, too, had seen those eyes! But I put the old Indian's alarm down to Haggard's excitement and the deep superstition of the Navajo race. I tried to cheer him up.

"Nonsense, Tom! He looks at me in the same way—looks at everybody like that. He's just excited about his machine, or invention, or whatever it is. You needn't worry. He'll get back to normal after Thursday night, when he's explained the thing to me."

But Tom was writing again. And the words were:

"You—must—not—come—Thursday. You must—keep away."

I laughed again. "No, I'll be there," I said. "I'm too curious. Now go home and get a good sleep. You're tired and worn out; you're seeing things that aren't so. Don't worry, Tom. Mr. Haggard's far from mad."

Yes, he was indeed far from mad!

Old Tom looked at me once more with his plaintive, dumb eyes. Then he turned, and slowly, silently trudged out of the house and faded into the mystic night.

Fool that I was to let him go! Witless, unseeing, selfish fool! Had I but known—had I but been able to see a few hours in advance!

But it's useless to waste vain regrets. I was to blame for old Tom's fate, and the thought has fanged and accused me ever since.

For when the Navajo returned to "Miner's Folly"—however, let me tell the tale as it happened.

I SLEPT soundly that night. One does, on the desert, no matter what the events of the day. And in the morning I followed my regular routine: a stiff, bracing walk, breakfast of the customary eggs and bacon, and then work.

I was writing, at that time, a series of rather boring articles on the great Western deserts for some geographical magazine; and I devoted a portion to the Indians that inhabited them. This necessitated a bit of research on my part, and most of the day I spent in delving into a few musty volumes I fortunately had on the subject. Quite accidentally I happened to strike a chapter explaining in detail the sign language of the Indian tribes: the art of speaking through gestures of the hands. It interested me, and I read it thoroughly.

But my mind was really occupied with thoughts of Jean Erskine's approaching visit. If you ever saw her, you'd understand how it was.

So passed Tuesday. Wednesday I really proved just how crazy I was over the girl: I cleaned up the house.

I did not have occasion to go near "Miner's Folly," and the strange appearance of old Tom and his fears passed gradually from my mind.

And, early Thursday morning, Jean rode out of the desert, a guide bringing her safely through the sandy wastes to my home.

She was radiantly beautiful in the fresh, streaming sunlight; I could see that her guide, a raw-boned, bronzed, typical desert Westerner, had fallen for her already, and I didn't blame him. Jean's like that. This chap put off leaving as long

as he could, and when I offered him a cup of coffee he almost split his long face with a grateful grin. Jean immediately began to fuss around the house, crying out now and again at the perfect atrocity of my arrangements, and disturbing all my loving work. She didn't want any coffee, so the guide and I sat down by ourselves in the kitchen—which didn't please him any too much.

"Say, Mistuh Wells," he drawled slowly, pouring a full five spoons of sugar into his drink, "yuh got a queer neighbor oveh here."

"Ared Haggard?"

"Yes, *suh,*" he said emphatically. "That's th' one. I reckon he's kinda cracked, ain't he?"

"Strikes me as being sane enough," I said, smiling. "Has he got the reputation of being a bit cracked?"

"Well, suh," my guest announced, "I ain't got no def'nite dope on him, but I sure do know he's hauled an awful lot o' funny-lookin' junk into that theh crazy castle o' his."

"Who's this?" asked Jean, coming out from the other room. "Some one near here?"

The guide grinned bashfully at her. "Mistuh Ared Haggard," he informed her. "He lives just a mite away from here in a doggone crazy castle we call 'Miner's Folly'."

"Castle?" repeated Jean. "Oh, Jim, you must take me over to see it!"

"He's asked us there tonight," I told her. "I didn't know whether you'd want to go or not."

I could see that her curiosity was aroused, for she said emphatically that she certainly did want to go. At which statement the guide perked up his ears.

"I dunno," he muttered, "as how I'd go oveh theh—'specially at night. Yuh see, miss, this fellah comes down t' th' village ever' oncet in a while an' hauls up a lot o' queer-lookin' machinery. Doggone 'f I know whut he wants it foh!"

I informed Jean that Haggard evidently had some kind of an invention he wished to demonstrate to us. "He's an unusual type of person," I finished, "but perfectly harmless. You'd like to go, then?"

"I would!" she said. And that sealed the matter.

The guide had sunk into the very gloomiest of moods, and he soon took his leave, muttering unintelligible things about Ared Haggard. Jean sped him on his way with a smile, however, and that cheered him up some. Then she came and sat with me, and we talked. We went all over the old ground—she trying to urge me to leave "this awful place," and be sensible about the financial difficulty which was postponing our wedding. And I just as firmly refused.

After a dreamy afternoon the shades of night stole over and cooled the desert, and transformed its rawness into a thing of soft beauty. "Well," said Jean, "you're just a pig-headed, stubborn old fool, and I don't like you a bit. Now let me get some dinner, and we'll go and see this mysterious Mr. Haggard."

So we set out.

WHEN I look back on it all, I marvel. I wonder that at the time I did not foresee the horror into which we were placidly walking. And yet, I suppose, I was not so terribly to blame. It is hard to realize how very thin the veneer of civilization, of normalcy, is—how easily an individual, deluded by opium-like dreams, can smash it, and recreate for awhile the barbarous savagery of the dim ages.

We walked slowly, my arm around her, and I knew perfect contentment. The evening was at its most beautiful

state, romantic, ideal. I was indeed happy.

The first glimpse of the castle, however, changed that mood. It seemed to sound a muttered, hushed prelude of what was to come—of the hidden beast soon to spring upon us. . . .

I had never seen "Miner's Folly" look so ominous.

The hulking hills behind it threw a mantle of deep shadows over its grotesque walls; in the rear of the place I seemed to glimpse lurking figures, shadow-cloaked; the very air was still and charged with a peculiar tautness.

I know that Jean felt it as well as I did, for she looked up at me and exclaimed: "What an uncanny spot this is!"

"It impresses me more that way this evening than ever before," I said. "D'you think we'd better turn back?"

She laughed at my suggestion. "But," she admitted, "I have a curious sensation of—of being watched. Does your friend Haggard always watch the approaching guest?"

"No," I told her. "But I can't blame him for watching you." At which she laughed again.

We walked into the brooding shadow of the doorway. The great door swung silently open—and there, peering at us from the dark hall, were Haggard's eyes.

For a moment I was wordless. And while we stood there, like dumb fools, there was a rattle and a slithering noise and, behind us, the raised portcullis dropped down, effectively barring us in.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed involuntarily. "What——"

Then Haggard came forward, with that smile on his lips.

"I must apologize," he murmured. "I did not mean to frighten you—merely wished to show the young lady what a really complete mediæval castle this is."

Overcoming my astonishment, I remembered my manners and introduced them.

"Delighted, Miss Erskine," said Ared Haggard, "that you braved my idiosyncrasies and came here tonight. Please excuse me for alarming you with that contraption."

His eyes positively gloated over her body.

"It did rather astonish me," she admitted. "But what a curious place you have here, Mr. Haggard!"

"Curious?" he said. "Curious? Well, perhaps. It suits me, however, exactly. Sit down, won't you, and have a drink?"

I noticed that he brought the wine himself this time.

"Where's old Tom?" I asked.

"Busy," said Ared Haggard. "Busy in the rear. You'll see him presently."

And we did see him presently. . . .

I still shiver when I think of it.

At any rate, we all seated ourselves in the somehow pregnant silence of the lofty hall, and I did my best to encourage a cheerful conversation. So did Jean. But, after a few minutes, words died on my lips, and I became conscious of a strange new noise—a strange new *sensation,* rather.

It was a low, vibrant humming, a humming that did not assault the ear only; it seemed rather to enter the whole body and to set the fibers and muscles and nerves quivering in sympathy with it. The nerves, I believe, particularly, for its deep, almost inaudible buzzing soon had me irritable and jumpy and at the same time afraid—of what I do not know. I was conscious of the steel-barred portcullis, of the heavy, tightly closed doors, of the fact that I was absolutely unarmed. I tried to convince myself that I was a suspicious fool, and strove to ignore that persistent humming. But I could not. It pierced through all my weak defenses, and I glanced uneasily at Ared Haggard.

He was watching me with the eyes of a hawk.

He was waiting for something, waiting, *waiting*.

Waiting for what?

And then I remembered the rich port wine he had given us. My God! That was it! Even as I thought of it, the dim walls above seemed to crumple, to sway, to jig and dance and pound to the rhythm of the hypnotic humming. And soon the narrowed, gleaming eyes of Ared Haggard had joined that mad capering; they too were leaping up and down, up and down, up and down. . . .

Frantically I stared at Jean Erskine. Her head had fallen over on her shoulder; she was asleep! Drugged!

I dragged at my limbs; I forced my leaden lips open; an abortive shriek came from them in the guise of a miserable groan. I tried to get up, and, trembling, half arose. Then my legs turned to clay; I staggered and fell.

Ared Haggard's thin eyes surveyed our helpless bodies mockingly. Mockingly—and triumphantly.

This was the night we were to see his invention. Only now can I understand the grim, sardonic humor of the man, the way he toyed with me, deliberately baited and enticed me through my curiosity.

Yes, we were to see his invention. We were to *feel* it!

HAVE you ever been under ether? You have an inkling, then, of the sensations, utterly mad and fantastic, which surged through my brain during that helpless period when I lay a victim of the drugs of the master of "Miner's Folly."

I seem to recall a malevolent, lank face, with the smile of the devil himself scourging its lips, coming close to mine; and shudderingly I remember the foul beat of its breath. I could not avoid it; I was no better than a limp corpse. I did not know whom this grinning face belonged to, for there was, of course, no remembrance in my doped brain of previous events. I recall being slung like a bag of flour over a bony shoulder. A bolt-studded door opened; I was carried, I think, into a large white room bathed in the most awful radiance I have ever beheld. I could not, then, define it; I was merely conscious of it.

Next, in this macabre, distorted episode, there came the vision of a hideous monster with a huge, jerkily moving body of dull metal.

I remember feeling the press of straps being fastened around me, binding me to some kind of chair. Before me moved two figures, one lean and long-legged, the other the monster of steel.

Then I sank into a black gulf, and apparently slept. Of this time I recall absolutely nothing.

Outside, the night thickened. The moon was on the other side of the world. Only a slow wind moaned around the desert castle called "Miner's Folly."

At about twelve, I think, I awoke.

I did not know, for the moment, where I was. The first thing I saw when my senses had partially returned was the bound, gagged figure of Jean Erskine, harnessed to a peculiar chair, over which hung a round headpiece of sheeny metal, sprouting a myriad of spidery wires.

I tried to call to her. I could not! My mouth, too, was gagged!

It was then that I turned my attention to the rest of the room; and it was then that my blood choked icily in my veins. It was then that the full realization of the situation we were in smote me with a sickening thud. And it was then that I cursed myself, and felt the pricking sweat spurt through my pores.

For we were behind those mysterious locked doors; we were face to face with

the deviltry I had unknowingly called Ared Haggard's "hobby."

Jean and I were alone, for the moment, in the room. And I was staring with bulging eyes at a contraption which I do not even pretend to understand, a contraption which still leads me to believe that Ared Haggard was a genius—not a madman. No madman could have devised and perfected that machine. It came from a cool and logical brain, not a disordered one. Although, to be sure, a genius is not a normal person. He lives in a world apart from ours.

To begin with, set in the white floor perhaps five feet in front of me was a deep vat, in which simmered a liquid that astounded my eyes with its constantly changing colors. And, more amazing still, this liquid seemed oddly transparent, for I could plainly see the bottom of the vat through it.

Next I discovered that the chair in which Jean was bound had small wheels on its legs, and these wheels were set on a pair of miniature rails, resembling street-car lines. And—good Lord!—the rails led to the brink of the liquid-filled vat!

My chair was similarly outfitted.

In the rear of the room bulked a huge black device shaped like a dynamo, and from this droned the low humming I had heard earlier in the evening. A confusion of cables led from it, some extending to the vat in the floor, wrapping around it, I judged, underground; others went to a sort of switchboard arrangement, from which fresh relays of cables wound to a flat platform that reminded me of an operating-table. And on this table lay two grotesque, hideous figures, molded in the external form of human bodies.

But they were made of steel!

Then, with a shudder, I recalled the man of metal that had moved jerkily before my drug-crazed eyes when I was first carried into this room.

Was that man a reality? I hardly dared think.

I noticed Jean's eyelids begin to flicker; presently they opened full, and she gazed at me. She did not, as yet, realize where she was. I prayed that, by some mercy, the drug would have a lingering effect on her brain, and that she would not be fully conscious of whatever we were doomed to suffer.

But the horror that dawned and grew in her large eyes forced me to abandon that hope.

I could not speak, could not comfort and reassure her—that was the hell of it. I could merely stare and try vainly to speak to her through my eyes.

A mad idea of struggling free entered my head. I inspected, as best I could, my bonds. I found that tight leather straps circled my body just above the elbows, clamping the upper parts of my arms to me, allowing me to move the lower part freely. My legs were also tied to the chair. I thought of tearing the gag from my mouth with my free hands; but this proved hopeless. The head was held firmly upward, and my fingers could not reach it by at least three inches.

No use! No use! There was no escape!

At that moment one of the doors swung open. And Ared Haggard stepped into the room.

He did not appear to notice us, but walked to the switchboard, fiddled with a few levers and then put what looked like a pair of radio earphones on his head. For some time he listened, again adjusted the levers, and next pulled full over a large control switch.

The low humming soared upward, grew to a quick, vibrant drone. Haggard appeared to be satisfied. He took

off the headphones and walked toward us, his captives.

I imagine the look in my eyes must have been murderous, for he glanced at me and then laughed—a harsh, deliberate cackle.

"My dear Wells," he chuckled, "I'm afraid you're taking this altogether in the wrong spirit. Please try to see it in its true light. You and the young lady are —er—lending your valuable selves to a glorious enterprise, not a mad butchering of bodies. I'm sorry that I was, of necessity, such a poor host tonight, but you'll realize, I feel positive, that the course I took was the only possible one. Really, I swear to you, if you were capable of conducting this operation, I'd willingly change places with you. You look at it in such a material way! Man's progress must always be made through sacrifice; the scientist, the prophet of a new day, is forced to stern measures in order to bring about his improvements. You can rest assured that in after years your name, and that of your fiancée, will be hallowed and honored; will be always coupled with that of Ared Haggard. Though you do not realize it now, that alone is ample reward for what you must submit to tonight."

He glanced down at the vat of radiant liquid.

"This," he continued, "is a mixture of various chemicals which neutralizes certain acidic forces in the body and aggravates others. You will find, I believe, that the vat treatment is the only downright uncomfortable one of the whole process. I really envy you your experience of it, your nervous reactions! After a few moments of rather painful penetration, you will have the feeling of leaving your body, of floating in an ecstatical medium; the head-clamp you'll observe just over your chairs will transfer certain qualities of your brain to the steel figures over there. This involves a profound formula never yet stumbled upon by science; it plants in the robots—but wait. I'll demonstrate the thing to you." He held up a lean forefinger.

"Remember," he pronounced, slowly and gravely, "this is not an experiment! My method has been proved! *It is a reality!*"

HE TURNED to the open door, which led into a room behind the one we were in.

"Come!" he said sharply.

There was a dull, heavy tread. A monster seemed to be moving. And then there strode in a thing that eclipses the figments of the craziest nightmare.

It was the man of metal.

It stood about six feet five; its trunk was merely a barrel-like casing of steel; squat on top of it was the creature's head, resembling the casque of mediæval knights. Mechanical? Yes. But from the head glowed two eyes that were *alive!*

They were now fixed dumbly on Haggard, who stood surveying it smilingly. The thing's arms swung from ball-like swivels imbedded in the huge shoulders; one of them ended in short, stumpy fingers; the other a pointed, sharp shear. It stood on wide pads of feet, stood firmly, solidly.

I saw that Jean had closed her eyes, and I was grateful.

"Bend over!" ordered Haggard. And the creature instantly bent, jerkily, but as if sure of what it was doing.

"Straighten up!"

Each command it followed, exactly, precisely.

"The power of individual thought," said Ared Haggard, "has been excluded. In short, the robot has no soul, though possessing the other human qualities of hearing, seeing, and obeying orders.

This one can not speak. Why? Because the man it was formed from was dumb."

My God! It struck me like a thunderbolt. This was old Tom, the Navajo servant!

I strained at my gag, my bonds. Useless, useless!

"Yes," said Ared Haggard, as if reading my thoughts, "this is the Navajo Indian you knew as old Tom. Unfortunately, he was the only material I had to experiment with. You can see why I wanted two perfect bodies to transform into robot shape.

"Can you appreciate what this invention means? Armies of robots, the consummation of the mechanical age!"

Thus he talked. I watched his thin eyes, his triumphant face, his leering smile, and I knew we could expect no mercy from him.

"It will make me," he said, "master of the world! But enough. I have partially explained the beauties of the method to you; you can thus appreciate it. . . . I think I will take the girl first."

He returned to the switchboard, put on the earphones, touched a lever. Immediately the helmet-like thing above Jean's chair swung down, fitting neatly over her head. The noise of the motor leaped to an infernal roar. In the vat, the liquid bubbled anew, a veritable rainbow of dazzling colors rioting through it. Haggard pressed a button; the chair in which the girl was bound rolled with terrible deliberation toward the edge of the vat.

This was agony! I strained, tried vainly to release myself.

And then a mad hope flashed through my brain.

Haggard's back was toward me. He was hunched over, listening intently, waiting, I fancy, for the exact moment to plunge the victim into the simmering fluid. Old Tom—the robot, rather—was standing where his master had left him, his ghastly eyes pointed, by some chance, toward me. But there was, of course, no recognition, no thought, no life in them.

Jean's chair was slowly tilting on the brink. In a second Haggard would cut her bonds and so force her into the liquid.

Then, with desperate concentration, I raised my hands. Waved them, to attract the robot's attention. Pounded one fist into the palm of the other.

Why?

The Indian sign language!

Would he respond? Would he understand? Again I repeated the signal, meaning "You——" And this time I thought I could detect a gleam of comprehension in the metal monster's staring eyes.

Frantically my hands moved. And he was watching me! "You," I signaled, "release—me." And repeated it again and again.

It was then that I blessed my casual study of the hand language—a study which I had paid much attention to years before, and which I had refreshed just two days ago.

For the robot moved ponderously toward me.

I could have shouted in my exultation. Haggard was still stooped at the switchboard; the roar of the machine was deafening. And Jean had seen what I was attempting to do; there was hope in the eyes that had previously held hopelessness.

The robot's right hand raised jerkily; the shear sped down—and sliced through a portion of my bonds!

My arms were free!

Haggard must have sensed something, for of a sudden he whirled around. A roar came from his twisted lips; he sprang toward us. He shouted an order at the robot; but the tumult of the machinery drowned it.

My legs were free!

I bounded up, still partially gagged, but otherwise gloriously capable. A vicious swing of my right hand caught Ared Haggard flush on his pointed jaw. He staggered, flailed at me. But I was sure of myself. I stepped back and belted him cleanly again.

The blow drove him back. He tripped, and fell, shrieking, into the vat of chemicals.

Horror-struck, I rushed up, and peered down into the liquid. The sight sent a shiver over me.

The man's clothes seemed to have vanished. His whole, naked body had gone a weird greenish-white. As I watched, it changed to a purply tint. His face was that of a dead man. Yet there must still have been consciousness in him, for, before my bulging eyes, his lips writhed —and he smiled!

I couldn't stand it. That smile! Feverishly I undid Jean Erskine, hauled her from the chair. She slipped down onto the floor in a faint. Then I rushed to the switchboard, with some crazy notion of stopping the roaring machine. As I pulled frantically at the switches I beheld one of the metal figures on the operating-table stir slightly. It was coming to life!

I jammed over the main switch. There was a crash and an insane bellow, and clouds of dense white smoke billowed into the room. I saw tongues of fire lick out. With what strength I had left I picked up the girl and staggered from the place.

The portcullis barred the main entrance, but I broke one of the long windows, shoved Jean through, and finally felt the breath of the sane night once more on my brow.

A second later, it seemed, there was a rending explosion, and "Miner's Folly" crumpled to the ground.

I HAVE never set foot on that desert since. Men might have discovered and wondered at the ruins of the castle—I do not know. I am content with my wife, and my life with her has partially erased the scars of the night Ared Haggard showed us his "hobby."

Partially, I said. Yes. Nothing can erase the memory of his last smile. . . .

The Portal to Power

by Greye La Spina

"With an animal-like snarl the Goat-man was upon her."

The Story Thus Far

DR. PEABODY, taking to California a mysterious talisman entrusted him by a reputed witch on her death-bed, accepts the apropos invitation of Job Scudder, airship magnate, to fly west. He finds that Quint, his recently discharged employe, has been taken on the "Queen" as mechanic, and foresees trouble, since Quint is a secret emissary of certain Initiates who wish to gain possession of the talisman. Leda, Scudder's pretty niece, appears deeply disturbed at the presence of Henry Winch, secretary to a guest on the "Queen." Quint gets control of the "Queen" and kidnaps the entire party. His associates have already brought the god Pan into materialization, and propose to make Leda high priestess.

CHAPTER 12

MEANTIME, in another room of the temple——

"Wait here," commanded Quint to the following party. "I shall bring Miss Scudder to you presently." In answer to the unspoken question on old Job's face, he added, "And Mr. Winch, of course. They are perfectly safe, I assure you. We only brought them here ahead of you because they were on this side of the closed portal last night. While you are waiting, breakfast will be served."

Gemma was still sobbing "Pan!" under her breath in a terrified manner, as she clung to Larry Weaver's arm, leaving his pistol hand, with remarkable perspicacity, free. Quint's eyes regarded her disdainfully.

The escort of quaintly garbed soldiers left the party when Quint had motioned them into the great, high-ceiled room where they were to wait. Couches were arranged in the ancient Roman fashion about a central table, upon which glowed the enticing colors of mellowed fruits in red, yellow, purple, pale green. Three serving women in gayly colored robes were setting steaming platters of food upon the table.

Quint departed unobtrusively, but Larry Weaver noted that two sentinels were left outside the door. He shook off the hand of the sobbing Gemma not unkindly and put the pistol back into its holster. His eyes sought the doctor's.

"I suppose we might as well eat?" said Larry. "If what that chap said is O. K., Miss Scudder'll be here in safety presently."

"That statement does give one appetite," returned the old doctor. "Come, Gemma, don't be so terrified. They don't intend to harm us as far as I can see. Calm yourself, my girl."

The Italian girl stood before him, her head hanging. Then she raised her oval face, and the liquid dark eyes met his with such terror in their depths that he felt a cold shudder run over him.

"You tell me to be calm and unafraid, sir. Why, how can I, when they have brought Pan back to earth? Is it possible you don't know what that means?"

Job Scudder cut her short bruskly.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Gemma. Pan is nothing but a myth."

Doctor Peabody turned a troubled face upon his friend.

"I'm not so sure of that, Job," he said.

"Don't tell me that *you*——?"

"My friend, what is happening to us is so incredible that it makes me feel that nothing is impossible to people who have set their wills upon it," returned the doctor seriously. "I am sure that this kidnapping has at its foot"—he lowered his voice cautiously—"the theft of the stone I am carrying to the Circle of Light."

"Let them have it, by all means, if they'll let us all go," Job urged with eagerness. "A geological specimen surrounded by an old woman's fanciful notions . . . would you let that stand in the way of our freedom from this intolerable situation?"

The doctor shook his white head slowly, lips compressed.

"That I can not do. I mean, Job, I must keep my word to old Hannah. Moreover, I am convinced that matters of grave import depend upon the safe delivery of that talisman into the right hands. Well, we shall see what we shall see. Meantime, as Quint suggested, suppose we have breakfast? Whatever is to happen, we will be the better for nourishment. I must admit that I am hungry," he confessed, with a half-smile.

"I don't know that I can eat," began Job, but the doctor's hand under his elbow urged him toward the table. The party followed the example of the two older men, and were soon distributed about upon the divans.

The serving women brought a convincingly modern breakfast of orange-juice, bacon, eggs, rolls, coffee and marmalade. Gemma alone could not eat. Her terrified eyes rolled toward the door every few minutes as if she expected something fearful and portentous to appear at the threshold and wished to be ready to hide herself when it came.

THE party had hardly started to eat when a sound at the door caught their attention. Henry Winch, holding the Airedale on the leash, came briskly into the room, scanning all the faces there with anxiety.

"Where's Leda?" he asked abruptly of Job.

Larry's head turned and he stared suspiciously at the speaker who took such a liberty.

"Quint says she'll be here presently," replied Job Scudder quickly. "Better eat, Winch, while you've the chance. None of us knows what we're confronting."

Henry Winch shook his head.

"I can't eat," said he. "But Whiskers could, and Suki, I presume."

On the dog's now patient and accustomed back Suki was riding in triumph. Gemma called the marmoset to her, and began peeling a banana for the tiny ani-

mal. When the Airedale sniffed the air wistfully, the Italian girl snatched up a platter from the table and regaled the dog with bacon and eggs.

Henry Winch replied to the queries of the doctor that he had been drugged in some way or chloroformed, and had wakened to find himself on a divan in a great room, and that immediately he had regained consciousness Quint must have been sent for. Quint had told him that the rest of the party were waiting for him.

As he talked, his anxious eyes were always on the door, and at last his watchfulness was rewarded. At the sound of advancing feet, the sentinels stood to one side to permit the entrance of a gilded litter carried by four men as black as ebony, their muscular bodies draped with leopardskins. The litter was set upon the ground, and the black bearers stood back, folding great arms upon their chests, faces impassive.

"Leda!" cried out Henry Winch, springing to the litter and drawing heavily embroidered curtains to one side with a clatter of sliding rings. "Leda! Leda! Speak to me!"

He leaned down frantically.

"Doctor Peabody, is she——?" Agonized entreaty rang in the secretary's voice.

Old Job had somehow reached the litter before the physician could rise from his divan. The tired gray face bent down. With one hand he motioned back the crowding Larry, Gemma, and Sir Hubert.

"Give her air," ordered the doctor, pushing his way among them. "She's perfectly all right," he added, after a moment's brief examination. "Coming out of a faint, that's all."

Henry Winch's keen young eyes did not move from the pale face of the girl who lay back among the silken cushions. When her lips trembled slightly and her eyelids lifted drowsily, a kind of sobbing came from his throat. "Leda!" he whispered, low and tenderly. "Come back, dear."

As if his voice had crossed the threshold of her drifting consciousness, the girl opened her eyes widely, crying out as she did so: "Hubert! Help! Help!"

Sir Hubert uttered a choking sound, his eyes seeking those of the Italian girl, who rewarded him with a look of utter hate and scorn, then knelt at her mistress's side.

"*Padrona!* It is Gemma."

Leda raised herself to a sitting posture and looked about her in a half-dazed manner. Her gaze drifted over Gemma, Sir Hubert, Larry Weaver. It rested for a moment upon Henry Winch's solicitous face. It passed the doctor by, and wavered to old Job. Her arms lifted to him, her one secure refuge.

"Uncle Job! Save me, Uncle Job! Save me from the Goat-man!"

She was safe in his arms, against his heart, then. Over her head that lay on his breast, old Job's eyes sought his friend's. Stark amazement and dire dismay was in his own.

It was Gemma who voiced their thoughts.

"She has seen Pan! Pan is unleashed upon the world! *Dio!*"

She beat her breast with clenched fists, wailing.

"Take that woman to the other end of the room and make her shut up," ordered the doctor sharply to Larry Weaver, who raised the shrieking girl and half led, half dragged her, to the other side of the table.

"Will you save me? Can you?" sobbed Leda hysterically, all her young bravado gone. "Look!"

She tore at that coronet above her smooth brow, but the old doctor stayed her hand gently.

"Wait, my dear. Until we know what this means, it may be wiser to leave that insignia of high authority where it is now."

"These clothes!" gasped Leda.

"Most becoming," the doctor reassured her, in a matter-of-fact voice, his eyes far away nevertheless. "Just calm yourself, my dear, and tell us exactly what has upset you."

The tone, the direct query, calmed Leda. She withdrew from her uncle's embrace shamefacedly, dashing away the tears of sheer terror and panic that had sprung to her brown eyes.

"Doctor, they have a monstrosity down here that they worship. A thing like a goat, but with a man's body above the waist," she explained, trying her best to keep the high note of hysteria from her voice. "He even had little black horns . . . and Quint called it Pan."

A loud wail greeted the last word. Gemma, rocking her body to and fro despairingly, sobbed louder than ever.

The old physician's face was grave. "Then these clothes and your coronet signify something?"

"I'm supposed to become the high priestess of that goat-thing."

Suddenly Leda's sense of humor got the better of her, now that she was back in her own party. She saw the look of solicitude plainly portrayed on the face of the secretary. Her pride braced her into a burst of laughter.

"This is too absurd," cried out Leda. "Quint said that if I didn't comply with their wishes, you folks would be thrown to the Pan-worshippers to be torn to bits. This masquerade is too silly for words. I mean, now isn't it idiotic?

"Larry lend me your pistol, will you? If I get near that disgusting goat-thing again, I'm going to see what it's made of. If it's flesh and blood, it ought to die," declared Leda. "If it isn't"—her voice faltered—"if it isn't—the more reason I should have a weapon."

Larry Weaver did not speak. He took the gun from the holster and gave it to her. She thrust it inside the bodice of her golden robe.

"At least, I've the way out," said she. "Oh, Uncle Job, I'm afraid!"

Henry Winch came softly to her side.

"Leda—they—they haven't dared hurt you, have they?" asked his deep, melodious voice.

Leda looked up from her uncle's shoulder, where she had again sought refuge, met those grave eyes and shook her head. In that fleeting moment none of the previous ugly hate shone in her own eyes. With a sigh of relief, the secretary stepped back unobtrusively.

"But what, if I may ask, is this all about?" inquired Larry Weaver briskly. "I don't want to push myself forward, sir," said Larry to old Job, "but it appears as if we ought to try to figure things out a bit and find out what's going to be asked of us."

"That is very simple," said a voice from the doorway.

Everybody turned. Quint stood there.

"THIS whole proceeding is an outrage," cried Sir Hubert in a high, angry voice.

Quint shot a scornful look at the speaker. Then he turned to the doctor.

"Doctor Peabody, I must have the talisman Hannah Wake gave you. You know well how I have been cheated out of it. It will be well for you if you deliver it to me without further ado."

"And if I refuse?" The doctor's voice was low; his faded blue eyes sharply upon Quint's determined face.

"I shall be obliged to have resort to force, which I would very much regret."

"I understand," said the doctor, but made no move to deliver the talisman. "And if I give it to you, may I ask what use is to be made of it?"

Into the younger man's eyes shot a flame of proud and fiery emotion.

"You know what that stone is—the portal to superhuman power——"

"Just what power in particular is it destined to aid in entering this mortal plane?" pursued the old doctor doggedly.

Almost fiercely Quint replied.

"Does it matter by what route, through what agency, light-hearted happiness comes to a world drowning in sorrow and pain?"

"Quint, you are evading a direct reply. There is something behind what appears simple and high-minded on your part. Your methods of attaining innocent happiness are entirely wrong; they fill me with suspicion. So," said the old doctor with staunch determination, "I refuse to *give* you the talisman."

Quint's teeth ground together. "Then I must seize it!"

"I know I am an old man, and not as strong as once I was," said the doctor gently, "but by taking this talisman from me . . . Consider, Quint. You lose the power of entry from higher planes. Evil will be the talisman's powers——"

"You are right. Well, perhaps it would be best for you to come with me to the high priest. He may be able to explain things better than I."

He turned, motioning imperiously for the doctor to follow him.

"Farewell, old friend," murmured the doctor to Job Scudder.

"Farewell?" repeated the airplane magnate, troubled.

"I do not know," said the doctor, his smile very sweet, "whether I shall be permitted to return, or not."

"Give me the stone, then," whispered Job. "At least, that may delay things a little."

Unnoted, Leda had listened to the two men's low voices. "Is there danger to you, Doctor, in that stone?"

"Why, yes, my dear," said he simply.

"Then drop it inside my bodice," she whispered. "Who could believe that *I* had it?"

The doctor looked at her earnest face for a moment, then leaned over her. "I leave with you," said he softly, "the hope of the world, or its greatest menace—who knows which? If I do not return, child, do what your heart prompts you, with this stone."

He followed Quint's marching feet, his gallant old form straight, his leonine head high.

"Uncle Job! What is this talisman?" whispered Leda.

Job shook his head. "My dear, I don't know, but John says it is something mysterious and supernatural that could do all manner of evil in the wrong hands. Also, as you may have gathered from that interchange of conversation between the doctor and Quint, the stone must be *given,* if it is to yield the highest results."

Leda's hands went to her breast, pressing into her warm flesh the small cold thing that the doctor's hand had dropped there when he bent over her in farewell.

"Oh, what a terrible responsibility I have undertaken! Hubert!"

She withdrew herself from old Job's arms and threw back her young shoulders under their golden webbing. At sight of her resolved and pale face Henry Winch took a step toward her, then waited, his eyes on hers.

"For all that was your fault, I forgive you, Henry Winch," said she firmly. "And for all that was my fault, I ask your pardon."

He stood rooted to the spot, regarding her with agonized eyes.

"I do not know what terrible thing we may yet have to face, and I do not wish to go into it with bitterness in my heart, for we may not come out of it alive."

"Leda, my darling!"

Larry Weaver's look at Henry Winch was grave. To Leda he said: "If there is anything I can do, tell me. You ought to know that I am completely at your service."

The girl hesitated, then drew herself up proudly.

"Thank you, there is nothing that any one can do for me now, I fear. I must walk alone."

Even as she spoke, there was the clash of metal at the doorway and Quint appeared, his face dark with anger.

"The litter awaits you, Miss Scudder. Everything depends upon you now. If you can take a sensible view of things, all will go well with this entire party. If you can not, other steps must and will be taken," said he, menace in words, voice and flashing eyes.

The Airedale was straining at the leash, muttering low growls, curling his lips back against his white teeth.

"Leda," murmured the agonized voice of Henry Winch, "if this cur is annoying you, say so, and I'll quiet *him,* at least."

Quint cast a threatening look at the secretary.

"Don't be a fool," said he curtly. "Dispose of me, and find a hundred men sprung up where I stood."

Leda intervened quickly.

"No, Henry Winch, you can do nothing for me. It is my cue for action. I must go. I see it now. It is up to me. I—I have—protection," she said, her eyes on his, and he knew that she spoke of Larry's automatic.

Larry himself was at her side, fists clenched, lean face working with emotion.

"No, Larry, there must be no disturbance," Leda cried hastily, quieting him with a touch of one hand on his arm.

"No harm will be done Miss Scudder or any of you if she proves amenable to her high destiny," Quint declared.

Head high, as the old doctor had gone before her, the girl went outside and mounted the litter.

"Holy Virgin! We are all lost! We are in the hands of the Pan-people!" screamed the Italian girl hysterically, and fell back on the divan writhing in an agony of apprehension. "We shall never see my mistress again!"

In the silence that followed, the eyes of the secretary met those of Job Scudder incredulously. When the younger man started toward the door, drawing the gallant Airedale with him, the old magnate put out a restraining hand.

"They are too many for us," said he in sad resignation. "We must await the event."

CHAPTER 13

A SMALL room, draped with embroidered velvet hangings on every side. Light fell goldenly from the glass dome in the ceiling upon a great bench on which was seated that old and reverend priest whom Leda had seen before. His benignant gaze was upon her, and he moved to one side to make place for her when she alighted from the litter. In silence, watchfully, the girl awaited his words, while the litter-bearers departed lightfooted from the room.

"We are quite alone, maiden," said the priest in a normal tone. "We can be quite frank with each other."

"Your frankness might begin with telling me where Doctor Peabody is," Leda answered quickly.

"He is already returning to your little party, in just as good shape as he went from it," replied the priest, smiling.

"But he was threatened——"

"He should not have been," said the priest, his face clouding over. "I fear my grandson Quint exceeds his instructions in his anxiety to bring about that which we are all aiming at."

"Undoubtedly," Leda observed dryly, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I fancy he was to blame for injuring our mechanic, so that he could go in the poor fellow's place in the 'Queen'."

"I wonder, sometimes, if the end does truly justify the means," cogitated the priest aloud. "Well, you mention that the doctor was threatened. He has refused to deliver to us the talisman that is the connecting link between us and the Powers Beyond."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked the girl.

The priest regarded her oddly.

"We will have it in our hands sooner or later, for to gain that stone any of our little company would wade through blood, because of what that stone may mean to the world. Moreover, maiden, the physician—when he realized that we were determined to have the stone—confessed that he had hidden it in the bosom of the Great Mother."

The girl could not restrain from a slight start, but caught herself quickly and regarded the priest's impassive face narrowly.

"That can mean one of two things," he went on serenely. "He hoped to mislead us, without giving us the direct lie. It may be that his trip West is a feint to draw us off the trail, and that he has left the talisman at home, buried in the garden. Perhaps, on the other hand, he has slipped it into the bosom of the Great Mother of Humanity—a woman."

With difficulty the girl controlled herself, but she knew that her efforts at self-control had not passed unobserved.

"If you are to be frank with me, tell me why you must have that stone?"

For a long moment the high priest scrutinized the girl's fair face thoughtfully. Then a sudden smile broke across his countenance, and he nodded his head several times.

"Your destiny is high. If you accept it, even my authority must bow to yours, for you will be the spokeswoman for the most high gods. So, my child, I will be frank.

"The stone I seek must be placed here," and his fingers touched that hollow opening in the jeweled breastplate he wore. "It is the Portal to Power. By its judicious and consecrated use the initiated wearer may open the door to other planes of existence, and may invite other and higher beings to this plane, that the world may benefit greatly."

"Suppose you had this stone, what would be my part to play?"

"A dedicated virgin is always a necessity when supernal powers are invoked, my child, for a lad old enough to realize the potency of chastity and yet young enough to be chaste is a difficult human being to find."

"What do you mean by 'dedicated'?"

"Do not be afraid. We do not want blood. We are all dedicated to the same grand object, happiness for the entire world, we who have begun by worshipping Pan, the god of simple nature. You, my child, would have the felicity to embody within yourself the power, the wonders, that are now waiting disembodied, on another plane."

"In spite of your aim, such a dedication sounds terrifying to me," faltered the girl.

"You need not fear. Your own entity

would be maintained, except at such times as the use of the talisman would enable those great and beneficent forces to use your body for their tremendous purposes. Yours would be the part of a most exalted priestess, spokeswoman for the high gods.

"Oh, believe me, maiden, you would be bringing the world periodical abandonment to the ancient wild joy in life, such as it has not seen since the sad-faced Christian era. Can you not understand what it would mean to tired humanity to be able to escape its heavy burdens without the use of intoxicating liquors or habit-forming drugs?"

"It sounds wonderful," Leda murmured reluctantly. "But if it is all right, why won't the doctor give you the talisman?"

"First, because he has promised to deliver it elsewhere, and he is a man of his word. So it can not be given by him, but must be taken away, and that would never do for us, because of the mysterious qualities of the stone that carries good only when it is *given*. Now do you understand his attitude?"

She nodded, face thoughtful.

"I know, by the way, where the doctor has hidden the talisman."

Keen black eyes narrowed upon the paling face of the girl.

"You know?" stammered she, and one hand went to her bosom instinctively.

The high priest's slow smile told her that she had betrayed herself and her charge. Angry tears of chagrin clouded her eyes.

"Even if you know where it is, I can under no circumstances give it to any one, without the doctor's permission."

"I think his permission has been tacitly given," suggested the priest, smiling insinuatingly. "He has given me a hint of where it is, and he *gave* the stone, did he not?"

"I shall not give it up," Leda said.

The priest's clean-shaven lips stirred in a sigh.

"Child, you are very obstinate. In that case, we must try other methods of persuasion. You see, maiden, you *must* give that stone to me; it *must* go into its destined place," and he touched again the hollow in his breastplate of fiery jewels.

Leda confronted him, her expression determined.

"I shall not give it up," she pronounced definitely. "If you wish to do good with it—which I must say I doubt—you will have to stop right here, for you dare not take it from me."

"So be it, my child. Then I must turn you over to one who can perhaps persuade you better than I."

He rose, and beckoned.

"Follow me."

"To whom are you taking me?"

"Pan must see you, and must decide if his power is sufficient to break the spell of evil that will rest upon the talisman if it is taken from you by force," explained the priest sadly.

At that hidden threat, Leda grew paler. Then with compressed lips, her hand tightly against her bosom where the talisman and Larry's lethal weapon lay together, she followed the high priest.

It was the same room to which Quint had conducted her before. The curtain concealed the dais but it could not deaden certain sounds that caused the high priest to check his forward stride with a quick breath, his brow frowning.

Like a warning rang his hail: "Evohe, Pan!"

Behind the heavy curtain sounded tripping feet, and as the Goat-man

whipped aside the silken drapery, Leda's quick eye caught the fluttering garments of a woman; her ear knew a woman's soft, mocking laughter. The Creature, thick lips twitching with sulky resentment, addressed his priest angrily.

"Why this intrusion?"

"Great Pan, is it well that you should so soon forget your high intent?" reproached the high priest. "I know—I understand—it is your prerogative—but——"

The Goat-man's small eyes glowered for a moment, then moved ever so slowly to the golden figure of the girl who faced him, braced for she knew not what. The thick lips quirked in an impish smile.

"Has the maiden consented?" asked he.

The high priest bowed low.

"She is stubborn, great Pan. In her bosom she hides the Portal to Power, and refuses to place it where it belongs, that the world may laugh again. I have brought her to you for persuasion."

The smile widened.

"It is well. Retire, oh bringer of good tidings. The maiden will consent," smiled Pan, thick lips a-leer, "so you may lay upon this dais your breastplate in readiness."

At the movement of the old man to go, Leda caught at his robe in momentary panic.

"Oh, don't leave me alone—with—that!"

Mirth convulsed the sly features of the Goat-man.

"Give her an attendant, by all means," he tittered. "Send her the black slave whom she knows."

In a moment a stumbling of feet came down the passage, and into the doorway waddled a great obesity in white drill uniform, with white chef's cap on the tight black wool.

Leda stared, then cried out.

"Captain!"

The chef paused, looked at her in a kind of dazed surprize. Then his suetty voice murmured plaintively: "Ah lost m' rabbit-foot. M' Venus gave m' rabbit-foot to me. All m' luck went away wid dat rabbit-foot. Got to git anudder charm."

"Captain, sit down here," Leda ordered, and pointed to one corner of the dais where stood the Goat-man, his mouth wide in a silent laugh that displayed glittering white teeth.

The chef obeyed, sinking fatly upon the edge of the dais, and letting his triple chins telescope against his breast despondently. Leda looked at him in a kind of despair. Of what use would Captain be in any emergency? Perhaps it was for this reason that Pan had suggested him. Her eyes rose at the ugly apprehensions that assailed her, and met the watchful, puckish eyes of the travesty grinning upon her. She shuddered; the high priest was gone and she was practically alone with Pan, for Captain certainly counted for less than nothing.

"Will you sit beside Pan, maiden?" asked the Goat-man in a high, strainedly agreeable voice that rang falsely on the girl's ears.

"Thank you. I prefer to stand where I am," she returned coldly. "Now, what is it you want me here for?"

Her warm brown eyes flashed courageously. She was telling herself frantically that it had to be a dream after all, because it *could not* be true. Even what her eyes appeared to see could not be real.

The Goat-man moved slowly toward her, puckish eyes on her face mischievously.

"You will give me the talisman, maiden," he said imperiously. "It is intended to do great and wonderful things,

and if you give it to me as you should, your reward shall be in proportion."

She shook her head, lips a tight crimson line across her white face, as the Goat-man came nearer.

"What, you have the talisman that will make the world happy, and will not give it up?" cried Pan, his voice suddenly harsh and strident. "Maiden, you are acting with rash and unadvised boldness. Know, if you do not give to me the Portal of Power without further trouble, I must order all your party delivered over to my people. And if my people know of your stubbornness in setting your ignorant will against the immortal gods, they will tear your friends to pieces, for my people have set their wills to bring joy to mankind, and nothing can stand in their way."

"Oh!"

"Your golden self," whispered Pan then sibilantly, "I shall keep for my very own self," and laughed shrilly.

"Oh, what a beast you are!"

"Yes, and no. Shall you selfishly keep the talisman with its potentialities for blessing to mankind, and send those you love to a ghastly death at the hands of my outraged people? Or will you lay the stone willingly upon my hand and save your friends and bring blessings upon all who live today? Maiden, if I am harsh, it is because I can not let a few blind and stubborn men and women block the way of happiness for all the world."

Leda, her hand clutching at her blouse, hesitated.

"Dare you tell me that your intentions are noble?" she demanded. "Only a few minutes ago——" and her voice trailed into silence, but her eyes met Pan's accusingly.

"I tell you that this body is merely the materialization of an idea, maiden. It is real, yes. Again, it is not real. Hence your veiled accusations are ridiculous. Moreover—is not the free companionship of man and maid a beautiful and joyful thing? If it is so little, you should be the more willing to give it up forever, to be the high priestess of joy to the world. Do not forget, maiden, that your part will be a high one."

Leda shook an impatient head.

"You are not saying anything to the point. Whatever you are, my heart tells me that you do not mean well to the world. I—I shall keep the talisman."

His white teeth bared in an animal-like snarl, the Goat-man was upon her with a lithe bound, thrusting one hairy hand into her bodice.

Struggling, she shrank from that raid upon her dignity; fear and disgust sickened her at the touch of that travesty upon human shape.

"You dare not take it from me!" she cried.

His hand withdrew, holding Larry's automatic, at which he looked in puzzled fashion. Leda, pulling away from the grasp of his free hand that had gripped her shoulder in its hairy grip, gave a little gasp, and snatched at the weapon frantically. Pan gave an ineffectual snatch, and the girl set her teeth and pulled the trigger.

Her amazed eyes saw the course of the bullet through the hairy chest of the Goat-man, and in horror and incredulity were obliged to witness the closing of the wound behind the bullet's flight as if no injury had been made.

"Another new thing," observed Pan, with childish interest. "Ah, you had meant it to hurt me, foolish maiden. You see, I am not real with the realness of yourself, or it would have hurt me. Now, do not be silly any longer; give me the talisman."

"You shall not have it!"

"Maiden, if evil follow, it will be your own stubbornness that has caused it." He lunged at her again, once more trying to get the stone from its hiding-place. "I am saving all your friends from horrid deaths that you are too callous to save them from by your own simple act of acquiescence."

"Oh, take it! Take it! But get away from me, for heaven's sake," cried out the girl hysterically. The nausea of her disgust at his unwelcome touch had completely unnerved her, combined with the amazing inefficacy of the bullet to rid her of him.

The Goat-man retired almost precipitately at her capitulation. A look of childish concern puckered his narrow brow.

"But I don't want to take it from you," he objected. "I want you to lay it down there beside the breast-plate. I will not even touch it, since you think I wish to bring evil to my beautiful world."

Half sobbing, wholly soul-sick, Leda drew the talisman from her bosom and laid it on the platform near the breast-plate.

Captain eyed her stupidly. He had lifted up his face with interest during her struggle with the Goat-man, and now his small, deep-set eyes followed her trembling hand as she laid the stone upon the dais.

"Is that a powerful spell, Miss Leda?" he finally asked. When he realized that the girl was too agitated to reply, he continued in a low mutter: "Mus' git me anudder spell. Mus' git me anudder——"

The Goat-man waved exultant hands at Leda. His high, tittering laugh sounded disagreeably triumphant, almost maliciously so.

"Now, maiden, as a reward you shall receive the highest post any maiden can hold, in the new regime that is coming upon the world. Why do you weep? Laugh, maiden, laugh! You have wisely saved your friends, and you will soon be the happiest of the happy."

Leda did not reply; she was sobbing hysterically.

"Come hither, priest! Take the maiden away until tonight. Maiden, replace the talisman in your bosom. The gift you have given may remain in your custody until tonight. Tonight will be the night of All Saints——" tittered the travesty.

"Evohe, Pan!" cried the old priest resonantly.

CHAPTER 14

THE Goat-man went nimbly up on the dais and jerked together the heavily embroidered damask curtains.

"You are dismissed," said his high voice, and the clatter of his little hoofs went rattling about behind the curtain.

"Maiden, follow me," murmured the high priest, but his request was couched in a voice so gentle, almost propitiatory, that Leda Scudder's drooping head went up proudly, for she remembered that he had said that even his will must bow to hers if she became the spokeswoman for the unknown powers that in some mysterious manner were to be embodied in herself.

With a poise and tranquillity that she did not feel, she said to him: "I have not eaten since noon yesterday. Is part of this new regime starvation for me?"

"Gods! This is indeed an oversight," cried the priest. "You shall be returned to your party immediately, and a meal served."

"Yet another thing," went on Leda, satisfied that her wishes actually meant something to the high priest. "Some kind of explanation must be made at once of this whole affair, this wholesale

kidnapping that has evidently been done under your orders."

"Maiden chosen by Pan, you shall be obeyed. My grandson or myself shall be with you as soon as you have eaten, to answer any questions you may desire to ask. Your mind must be set completely at rest, so that you will know your own high destiny and what this means to the world."

Leda seated herself in the gilded litter and was borne back to the rest of the party. Henry Winch was first to reach her.

"Thank God, Leda! You are safely back. They have not dared any insolent tricks?" he demanded fiercely.

The girl gave him a side glance from under lowered lids, but her expression was far kinder than the secretary had had bestowed upon him since the ill-omened flight of the "Queen."

"Perfectly safe, Henry Winch," said she, accepting his proffered aid to alight from the litter.

Open arms and Job's broken cry, "My little girl!"

Into that shelter Leda crept, suddenly weak and shaky from her strange experience. Her hysterical sobs filled them all with consternation. What had happened to break that proud, high spirit? Over her bowed head her uncle's questioning gaze met the old doctor's grave face.

"Nerve shock," diagnosed John Peabody softly. "I suppose they took you before Pan, my child?"

"That—creature!" spat out the girl with a long shudder. "Oh, I've been a cowardly fool. I've given that horrible monstrosity the stone you put in my charge." And with that, she went to sobbing again, uncontrollable, hysterical weeping.

"It was written," murmured the old physician, shaking his leonine head.

Job's tender hand stroked Leda's hair monotonously, soothingly. His lips were a thin, tight line.

"Leda—tell me—if anybody has dared lay a finger on you, I'll throttle him," snarled the entirely altered voice of the secretary, poised and sophisticated no longer. "Tell me, Leda!"

Job Scudder saw the flame in those eyes, and jerked his head at the secretary in quick caution, while the doctor laid a hand restrainingly on the young man's twitching arm. Behind them Larry Weaver's lean face peered, lips drawn back into an ugly, menacing threat.

"There's nothing to tell," murmured Leda's subdued voice at last. "He—he frightened me so—that I gave up the stone. But please don't give a thought to that now. In a few minutes either Quint or that old priest will be here to tell us all about this place, and everything."

"She's had nothing to eat since lunch yesterday," suddenly snapped the secretary. "For heaven's sake, Leda, get something into your stomach. You're hungry. That's what's the matter with your nerves."

The old magnate nodded confirmatorily, and drew the girl to the tables.

"Here, my dear, is hot coffee. A cupful of that will do wonders for you."

Leda complied, and gulped down the bracing coffee.

"I'd like to have that gun back, if it's all the same to you, Miss Leda," Larry exclaimed.

The girl smiled wanly.

"By all means, Larry. I've found," said she with a hard little hopeless laugh, "that it's no weapon to use against Pan."

A quick interchange of glances between the men, and a lifting of Larry's eyebrows incredulously.

"If you have no use for it," said the pilot, tentatively, and held out his hand

to take the automatic which the girl gave him. "I have an idea," he continued sotto voce to Henry Winch, "that one's aim must be pretty good to make any impression on that creature she speaks of."

"Leda," spoke up the doctor, drawing his pocket medicine case out thoughtfully, "I am going to give you a few pellets in an envelope. Keep them where they won't be taken from you, child, and in case such a contingency arises as might make it necessary," here his piercing eyes told much to Leda's inquiring ones, "take them. Nothing on earth can harm you once you have taken these. Oh," he added quickly, in reply to Job's horrified look, "their action is swift and painless. I for one believe it would be better to go out at will into God's hands than to remain helpless in the hands of those who might have power to injure my soul."

"Thank you, Doctor John," whispered the girl, and hid the small white envelope in her bosom.

She withdrew herself a little from the encircling arms of her uncle, as he sat beside her on the divan, and lifted reddened eyes to look at the anxious little group about her. She drew out the stone, and held it, glistening, pulsating almost with milky opalescence now, as if with some strange life of its own.

"That's an odd-looking thing," commented Henry Winch, bending over to get a closer look at it. "Seems as if it were alive."

"It is. That is, through it pulsate the living, throbbing streams of power from other planes of life. But how is it that you still possess it, if you have given it to Pan also, my child?" and the doctor pushed his heavy spectacles up and peered at the stone again.

"He told me to keep it until tonight."

"Tonight? Tonight!" screamed the hysterical voice of Gemma, and she flung from her with a frantic gesture of impatience the chattering marmoset. "This is the night when all that is evil is abroad! *Dio mio!*" and she flung herself face downward on her divan, moaning pitifully.

Sir Hubert, his face tense with some secret emotion, regarded her in a kind of desperation. Finally, he crossed the room and stood, without speaking, beside her. Once he put out his hand to her shoulder, then as quickly withdrew it, flinging a swift glance at the rest of the party to see if his action had been observed. But they were all far too busy to watch Sir Hubert.

"Gemma is right. Tonight is All Hallow Eve," murmured the old doctor, half to himself. "Like Walpurgis Night or May Eve, it is the time for powers from other planes to function here. Lord, Lord, what a hideous mess we've been drawn into! I blame myself for coming along with you folks, carrying that stone!"

Leda, still with the stone on her extended palm, regarded the old physician with intentness.

"Child, what do you want me to do? If I take it, they will only rob me of it in the end. And if they force it from me, the result may be tragic, for tonight this stone can be utilized to force an entry onto the earth-plane of God only knows what untrained and undisciplined forces of evil. . . . It is better that you keep it, my dear, and give it when you must. Perhaps, then, the higher powers will see fit to take a hand in this drama."

Mechanically the girl dropped the stone back into the bosom of her golden frock. Her eyes went to Henry Winch, as if impelled by some powerful influence that she could not combat.

"If you are afraid, dear," said the secretary softly, "let me take it."

She shook her head slowly from side to side.

"Why? If it must be given them in the end, why not give it without friction? Perhaps, as Doctor John says, if we give it willingly. . . . Oh, they told me I was to be a kind of high priestess of their cult, and even that high priest would have to take my orders," she remembered.

"Did Pan tell you that?"

She nodded at the old doctor, who sighed thoughtfully.

"Well," said he with reluctance, "perhaps things may come out better than seems possible to us now. If such authority is to be vested in you, my child, the way may open for our safe escape from this strange and nerve-racking situation."

"Gemma!" ordered Leda sharply, recovering something of her pristine poise. "Stop your noise, do! Hallowe'en isn't going to hurt you, and it looks as if we were going to have a mighty exciting Hallowe'en party. Here, Suki!"

The whimpering marmoset scampered across the floor to her and sprang to her shoulder. Leda's tender hand stroked the furry little body abstractedly.

Gemma, lifting her face from her cupped wet hands, looked up directly into the solicitous countenance of Sir Hubert. For a moment she appeared amazed. At his imploring look she bridled and looked quite through him, much to his obvious dismay and despair.

"While we have time to ourselves," hurriedly observed John Peabody, "I'd better tell you people my experience with Pan."

Leda leaned against Job's shoulder, and appeared not to notice that Henry Winch's hand was resting lightly on her arm. Larry walked noiselessly to and fro, but he was listening tensely not only to the doctor, but also to the sounds in the corridor without, where the ebon-skinned litter-bearers still stood beside the gilded litter.

"The high priest asked me directly for the stone, and when I refused, took me to Pan. There is an interesting anomaly——"

"Is that what you'd call him?" Leda wanted to know disgustedly. "I call him a horrible, unnatural monster. Ugh!" she shuddered, the memory of his groping hairy hand returning to her sickeningly.

"Monster he may be, yet not purely physical monster," mused the old doctor. "He is a splendid example of what consciously directed will-power and occult knowledge can do in the way of embodying an idea in a material form."

"Do you actually mean," interrupted Larry Weaver truculently, "that this Pan is merely an idea? From what you've told me, he is just plain matter."

"Matter, of course," responded the old doctor patiently. "But the entirety of him is the massed-together ancient belief in his existence. Without it, he simply could not *be*. Hence, I call him an idea."

Larry snorted.

"Can you kill an idea with a couple of bullets?" he inquired pointedly.

The doctor regarded him with gravity.

"Yes . . . and no, Larry."

"It's the 'yes' I'm interested in," growled the air pilot.

"You see, so much depends upon the idea. If it is embodied in something material, and that material thing is destroyed when it is believed to be indestructible——"

"I think I get you. And the 'no'?"

"Sometimes the embodiment of an idea, when destroyed, leaves the idea itself stronger than ever. Christianity is an example of this; the Great Master

was, apparently, slain, but He left behind Him an idea that has revolutionized the world."

The airman, his keen face darkly musing, turned away.

"Go on, John, with your interview with Pan. We don't know how long a time we may have without interruption," Job urged.

"Oh, yes, yes. So the high priest took me to Pan. Pan began in a most friendly manner until I positively declared myself out of any occult experiments that might be made. Then he merely tittered at me, and said he would be pleased to send me away with the rest of the party . . . except one member."

The doctor's look was significant. Gemma whipped one hand to her lips as she regarded her young mistress, whose lips compressed as her warn brown eyes met the old doctor's squarely.

"The dirty dog!" ejaculated Henry Winch hotly. "Does he think for a moment that we would go away and leave Leda behind?"

"Just the same, I believe we would be wise to let him think just that," suddenly whispered Larry Weaver, approaching the little group.

"Are you mad?" snapped old Job, with an irate glare at the pilot.

"Not a whit," responded the lattter, still in a lowered voice. "If we can make them think that Leda actually wishes to remain, and that she wants us sent away because we might interfere with her actions . . . we might get them to put the 'Queen' up on that plateau again, and we might all——"

"So childishly simple!" growled Henry Winch. "Of course, the glass walls would melt before us when we wanted to go!"

"I have a theory as to that," doggedly replied Larry.

The old physician beat one fist into the other palm.

"Of course! I have it!" He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Leda can go to see us off, and once we are up there, Larry can hold off the bunch at the head of the steps with his gun, and——"

"Righto. Only it will be *I* who will hold them off," declared Henry Winch with a touch of fine hauteur. "It is my right." And his eyes sought those of old Job.

"Right nothing. Your privilege, you may mean," scowled Lårry. "Well, I've got the gun, haven't I?"

"In case our plans fail——" Leda faltered, nervously.

"My child, you have what I gave you, and they will mean freedom for you from any situation that may complicate matters beyond our power to remedy."

"That's putting it very prettily," groaned Henry Winch, "but it does seem to me that we ought to be able to get Leda away in safety."

The girl turned her face upward and looked at him gravely for a long moment. Then, meeting his ardent, anxious eyes squarely, she smiled very sweetly. Her face, as she made sure of the small envelope in her bosom, was so absorbed and distant, that Henry Winch turned away from her with a kind of groan, as if he could not bear to look upon it.

"Larry, you've our only weapon, it appears. Do not forget, in our plans, that you alone can pilot the 'Queen', so you must take the best care of yourself, for the sake of your young mistress," warned Doctor Peabody.

Henry Winch began to pace the room by Larry's side, and the two men who loved Leda Scudder started talking very animatedly together. Leda's eyes were on them, and a half-puzzled look passed

over her piquant face as she saw them all at once clasp hands firmly, looking at each other with such warm looks that her heart felt lighter and safer in their love for her. It appeared to her that they had very much to say to each other, and she continued watching them until a clatter of spears at the doorway sounded, and in the opening stood the high priest, looking at them expectantly.

The startling denouement will be told in the thrilling chapters which bring this story to a conclusion in next month's WEIRD TALES

A Weird Tale of the Sea

THE BOAT ON THE BEACH

By KADRA MAYSI

THE life-guards watched her, every night, come down the boardwalk from the beach hotel, cross the dunes obliquely, and go to sit in the boat.

They talked about her—idly, but speculatively, as lonely men talk about the smallest thing which crosses their horizon—and they agreed that "she wasn't bad-looking."

She was a slim woman—probably somewhere in the thirties—a slim woman, dressed all in white, with a lot of wavy, blue-black hair. They noticed that her hair was unusually beautiful and most unusually abundant. They noticed that she had narrow feet in the low-heeled, one-strap white kid pumps, and slender ankles above them. They noticed that she wore no color on her clothes, her cheeks, or lips.

One day she turned and looked directly up when the boy in the observation room had the glass trained upon her. The boy fell back a step and said, "Good God!" When the others asked him what the matter was, he said, "I saw her eyes." They asked him what color her eyes were and what was the trouble with them. He said, "They're big, and I think they're black as her hair, but they look—they look—well, they look like you'd expect the eyes of somebody nailed on a cross to look!"

She did not look up again, but every evening, before dark, she came down and crossed the dunes and sat in the life-guards' boat for several hours. And the life-guards talked about her—idly, when they were not discussing the far more important topic of the latest maritime disaster.

For this was just three weeks after the passenger steamer *Astarte* had sprung a leak and foundered—in foul weather—just a few hundred miles off the coast. For some reason, which the surviving members of her crew could not satisfactorily explain, her S.O.S. had not been sent out in what her surviving passengers

and the public considered time enough to bring her aid. More than fifty per cent of those on board had perished either in the launching of the lifeboats or in the stormy, bitter cold of the days before that pitiful flotilla was picked up by the rescue ships.

Shipping boards and owners, passengers and reading public, investigated, questioned, promised explanations, threatened suits, wrote to the papers. And when they were through nobody knew any more than they had known at first. For the only man who had that secret locked under the breast of his blue uniform had done his best—whether right or wrong—and had gone down on the bridge of his ship.

It was a far more important topic than idle discussion of a slim woman in white who sat alone in a boat on the beach from sunset until the three-quarter moon had passed high overhead toward the west.

The life-guards were discussing it gravely, humbly, understandingly, as beseemed men who know that the sea has crises too great for any man to meet.

The boarders at the beach hotel—most of whom had never taken a longer sea voyage than that afforded by the six-mile ferry from the mainland to the island—were discussing it shrilly, assertively, not hesitating to censure and to state what should or should not have been done.

But everybody was discussing it—even the eight-year-old small boy who came every day from the nearest cottage to inspect the life-guard station, to mount the lookout ladders, to climb into the boats, to help the sunburned men in white wash, paint, scrub brass, and oil the heavy two-wheel carriages so that they might be, momentarily, ready to be launched upon their runway to the sea.

The small boy knew that a boat had sunk—a big boat, full of men and women and little boys and girls. His daddy had said they were drowned because the captain had not sent a wireless off in time. But the oldest life-guard—the little one with the bow-legs and the grizzled hair that stood up straight—had said: "Sonny, all a man can do is do his best." The small boy understood, too, and, privately, he agreed with the life-guard rather than with his daddy. He was in the third grade—would be when school opened again—and he practised writing on the beach "A-S-T-A-R-T-E."

One morning while he was laboriously tracing it the lady in the sleeveless white silk dress came up behind him. She said:

"You, too?"

And, not understanding but liking her voice, he looked up and smiled at her with his wide "governor's gates" of missing teeth.

She said: "Will you come down to the drug store and eat an ice cream cone with me?"

At the counter she said: "What do you want?"

He chose a strawberry one and asked politely: "What do *you* want?"

She looked at him with her wide black eyes, and the soda jerker heard her say: "A little boy like you—for a sea anchor!"

But she ordered another strawberry cone and then, for some reason, did not eat it and asked him if he would be kind enough to eat it for her.

That evening she came down, as usual, along the walk, across the sandhills. Looking up over the dunes from the boat she saw the sea-oats etched in golden grain and sheaf against the sky. Sunset, out on the back beaches, had set the marsh aflame. Up to the zenith its wastrel opals spattered the western clouds. East, the giant copper disk of the moon came out of the sea.

She sat there so long—so long—with her arms clasped around her knees. The wind was whipping her thin white dress

and loosening strands of her long black hair. But her body did not move. To the life-guard up in the observation tower she looked a woman carved in stone. She saw the moon go higher and cut, in the sea's green jungle, a silver road. It stretched from the climbing planet straight to the boat on the beach. Her brain was grasping at scattered thoughts as a drowning person grasps drifting straws. She was half-remembering queer old lines—things that nobody reads nowadays. Who wrote

"——wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
To the ocean far and wide?"

The life-guard up in his conning-place remembered that next night would be the full moon and the flood tide. He looked again to see that the boat, on its heavy carriage, was well above the high tide mark. It was well above it, there in the moonlight, with that lonely figure sitting in the stern.

The small boy, lying on his stomach on a sand dune just a hundred yards away, was watching too. He had seen the red moon rise and throw that path across the sea to the boat. Being a child and nearer to God, his vision was clearer than theirs. He saw what the life-guard did not see—what the slim woman in the boat did not see although she looked for it with eyes which bore witness to her crucifixion every night. He had been watching every night—the small boy on the dune. It had happened every night—and it was happening again. But the woman in the boat sat, marble-still. The wind moved only her dress and her hair. She seemed to think that she was alone at the end of that long moon-sequined path.

FLOOD tide foamed on the beach next night—brimmed the gutters and shallow pools—washed the sides of the outpost dunes into new, concave, wave-carved shapes.

Just before sunrise the lookout saw that the boat on the beach was gone. The man who had had the night watch reported having seen it shortly before midnight. Tide had turned three hours before that time and it was then well above the water. Anyway, it was an eight-man boat and it took two husky ones to launch it. Yes; he was sure he had seen it at eleven-fifty p. m. He was absolutely sure—for the woman in white had been sitting in it then.

The two life-guards who went down to investigate found the heavy carriage with its two broad-tired wheels, its chassis, pole, and ropes, well out in the surf of the now incoming tide. That in itself proved that someone had taken the boat. Had the flood tide, coming higher than usual, washed it out, it would have taken the boat alone and not the carriage with its sand-imbedded wheels. Some persons—for the strongest life-guard could not alone roll that carriage down the shingle—had rolled it out into the surf deep enough to launch it.

With one man hauling on its rope and one pushing on the pole, they got it back to its place high on the beach. Starting up the boardwalk, they met a group of men from the hotel. The manager himself was one of them and he was speaker.

"We've just been to the station to report a woman missing. One of the ladies didn't come in last night. Can you help us?"

"What did she look like? We'll send a man out on the beach and send a boat out, too, right away."

"She was a slim woman, with a lot of dark hair. And she was dressed all in white."

"That's the woman who sits in the boat," said the grizzled life-guard. And the younger one added:

"She was in it last night. Sawyer said he saw her there just before midnight."

"What boat? Where's the boat?" demanded the manager.

"The station boat that sits on its carriage just across the dunes. She's been coming down and sitting in it for hours every night."

"Where is it now?"

"We'd like you to tell us that. Somebody rolled the carriage down the beach and launched it sometime between midnight and daybreak."

"And you say a slim woman—a woman in white—was sitting in it last night?"

"Sawyer saw her in it at eleven-fifty."

"But, great God," said the manager, "that was Mrs. Card!"

"What Mrs. Card? You don't mean——"

"Yes; I do mean," said the manager. "That was *the* Mrs. Card—wife (I should say widow) of Captain Card of the steamship *Astarte.*"

"I hadn't heard she was here," one of the coast-guards said.

"She registered under a different name," answered the manager. "She wanted to be quiet, and that was the only way. But she told me who she was and why she was doing it. Do you think we'll find her on the island or do you think——?"

Nobody said what he thought, but they all were thinking hard. Not one of them failed to wonder whether the theft of a seaworthy boat, by parties unknown, and the suicide of a woman beside herself with grief might not be unrelated incidents occurring only by coincidence on the same night.

Within thirty minutes there were half a dozen volunteer boats, as well as the station boats, out past the breakers, and posses were patrolling the beach and every foot of the island.

But midday came without a trace of lost woman or lost lifeboat.

THE oldest guard was in the lookout room when the little boy climbed the ladder. He usually came earlier, but he had been following the search. The station was quiet, for all the men except the lookout and the wireless operator were engaged in that search.

He climbed the ladder—the little boy did—and stuck a tow-head in a cap much too large for it into the door of the lookout room. And the grizzled lookout dropped the glasses in his hand and stared as if he saw a ghost.

"Godamighty! Where'd you get it? Where'd you get that cap, Buddy?"

The little boy took it off and, proudly, held it out to him. And the man set it on one gnarled fist and turned it slowly, unbelievingly, around with the other hand.

It was the regulation blue and white cap of a passenger steamship's officer. Its gold braid and insignia told those who knew the sea that it was a master's cap. And the lettering above its vizor told anyone who read that it was property of the *"S. S. Astarte."*

The lifeguard was still turning it, slowly, unbelievingly.

"Where'd you get it, Buddy?"

"On the beach—where the man dropped it while he was shoving the boat last night."

"What man, Buddy?"

"The man who came and took the boat and the lady away with him, the same man who used to come and sit, every night, in your boat with her."

Landsmen have always called sailormen a superstitious folk. This is as it should be, for superstition—like everything else—lends itself to the individual interpretation. And those who go down to the sea in ships know well enough that there

occur phenomena which are outside landsmen's experience.

So the old life-guard turned the cap in his rope-gnarled, salt-scarred fingers.

"Tell me about it, Buddy. Sure you didn't dream it?"

"No, sir. I was wide awake, sitting out on the sandhill there. Nights that mother and daddy go to the hotel dances I stay out until the music stops, then run back home before they get there."

"Tell me what you saw. You say you've seen him before?"

"Oh, yes; he's come every night since the lady came. I don't know which side he comes from. I never see him until he's on the beach, at the edge of the waves, right where the end of the road of moonlight is. He goes and sits in the boat with her. But she never seemed to see him before. Perhaps she saw him last night because the moon was so bright and big."

"She saw him?"

"Yes, she saw him. She held out her arms to him, and he came across the beach and put his arms around her. I watched him launch the boat and, when it was afloat, jump in it with her. I thought he had a right to do it because he was dressed like an officer."

"He was dressed like an officer?"

"Yes; like the captain of the ferry that brought us over here. He had a blue uniform with gold braid on his cuffs. And he had this cap. He dropped it on the beach. Can I keep it?"

The telephone bell. It was the hotel manager asking whether there was yet any news of boat or woman.

"No; not yet," said the grizzled guard; and, after he shut the telephone, he handed the blue cap back to the little boy.

"Yes; you can keep it, Buddy," he said, "because—there won't be any news!"

---

*Lucifer**

By JOHN D. SWAIN

THE notorious Remsen Case was table talk a year or so ago, although few today could quote the details offhand. Because of it, half a dozen men were discussing psychic trivialities, in a more or less desultory way. Bliven, the psychoanalyst, was speaking.

"It all hinges on a tendency which is perhaps best expressed in such old saws

* From WEIRD TALES, November, 1923.

as: 'Drowning men clutch at straws,' 'Any port in a storm,' or, 'A gambling chance.'

"When men have exhausted science and religion, they turn to mediums, and crystal-gazers, and clairvoyants, and patent medicines. I knew an intelligent pharmacist who was dying of a malignant disease. Operated on three times. Specialists had given him up. Then he began to take the nostrums and cure-alls on his own shelves, although he knew perfectly well what they contained—or could easily enough have found out. Consulted a lot of herb doctors, and long-haired Indian healers, and advertising specialists."

"And, of course, without result," commented the little English doctor.

"I wouldn't say that," said Bliven. "It kept alive the forlorn spark of hope in his soul. Better than merely folding his hands and waiting for the inevitable! He was just starting in with a miraculous Brazilian root, when he snuffed out. On the whole, he lived happier, and quite possibly longer, because of all the fake remedies and doctors he spent so much money on. It's all in your own mind, you know. Nothing else counts much."

"All fakes, including the records of the P. S. R.," nodded Holmes, who lectured on experimental psychology.

The little doctor shook his head deprecatingly.

"I shouldn't go as far as that, really," he objected; "because, every now and then, in the midst of their conscious faking, as you call it, with the marked cards and prepared slates, the hidden magnets and invisible wires and all, these mediums and pseudo-magicians come up against something that utterly baffles them. I have talked with a well-known prestidigitator who has a standing bet of a hundred guineas that he can duplicate the manifestations of any medium; and yet he states that every now and then he finds himself utterly baffled. He can fake the thing cleverly, you understand; but he can not fathom the unknown forces back of it all. It is dangerous ground. It is sometimes blasphemy. It is blundering in where angels fear to tread."

"Piffle!" snorted Bliven. "The subconscious mind explains it all; and we have only skirted the edge of our subject. When we have mastered it, we shall do things right in the laboratory that will put every astrologer and palmist and tea-ground prophet out of business."

Nobody seemed to have anything to answer, and the psychoanalyst turned to the little doctor.

"You know this, Royce," he asserted, a bit defiantly.

"I don't pretend to follow you new-era chaps as closely as I ought; but I recall an incident in my early practise that is not explicable in the present-day stage of your science, as I understand it."

Bliven grunted.

"Well—shoot!" he said. "Of course, we can't check up your facts, but if you were an accurate observer, we may be able to offer a plausible theory, at least."

Royce flushed at his brusk way of putting it, but took no offense. Every one makes allowances for Bliven, who is a good fellow, but crudely sure of himself, and a slave to his hobby.

"It happened a long, long time ago," began Royce, "when I was an intern in a London hospital. If you know anything about our hospitals, you will understand that they are about the last places on earth for anything bizarre to occur in. Everything is frightfully ethical, and prosy, and red-tapy—far more so than in institutions over here, better as these are in many ways.

"But almost anything can happen in

London, and does. You love to point to New York as the typical *Cosmopolis*—because it has a larger Italian population than has Rome, a larger German than Berlin, a Jewish than Jerusalem, and so forth. Well, London has all this, and more. It has nuclei of Afghans, and Turkomans, and Arabs; it has neighborhoods where conversation is carried on in no known tongue. It even has a synagogue of Negro Jews—dating certainly from the Plantagenet dynasty, and probably earlier.

"Myriads spend all their lives in London, and die knowing nothing about it. Sir Walter Besant devoted twenty years to the collecting of data for his history of the city, and confessed that he had only a smattering of his subject. Men learn some one of its hundred phases passing well; Scotland Yard agents, buyers of old pewter or black letter books, tea importers, hotel keepers, solicitors, clubmen; but outside of their own little pool broods the eternal fog, hiding the real London in its sticky, yellow embrace. I was born there, attended its university, practised for a couple of years in Whitechapel, and migrated to the fashionable Westminster district; but I visit the city as a stranger.

"So, if anything mysterious were to happen anywhere, it might well be in London; although, as I have said, one would hardly look for it in one of our solid, dull, intensely prosaic hospitals.

"Watts-Bedloe was the big man in my day. You will find his works in your medical libraries, Bliven; though I dare say he has been thrust aside by the on-march of science. Osteopathy owes a deal to him, I think; and I know that Doctor Lorenz, the great orthopedist of today, freely acknowledges his own debt.

"THERE was brought to us one day a peculiarly distressing case; the only child of Sir William Hutchison, a widower, whose hopes had almost idolatrously centered in this boy, who was a cripple. You would have to be British to understand just how Sir William felt. He was a keen sportsman; played all outdoor games superlatively well, rode to hounds over his own fields, shot tigers from an elephant's back in India, and on foot in Africa, rented a salmon stream in Norway, captained the All-English polo team for years, sailed his own yacht, bred his own hunters, had climbed all the more difficult Swiss peaks, and was the first amateur to purchase and operate a biplane.

"So that to natural parental grief was added the bitter downfall of all the plans he had for this boy; instructing him in the fine art of fly-casting, straight shooting, hard riding, and all that sort of thing. Instead of a companion who could take up the life his advancing years were forcing him to relinquish, in a measure, he had a hopeless cripple to carry on, and end his line.

"He was a dear, patient little lad, with the most beautiful head, and great, intelligent eyes; but his wrecked little body was enough to wring your heart. Twisted, warped, shriveled—and far beyond the skill of Watts-Bedloe himself, who had been Sir William's last resort. When he sadly confessed that there was nothing he could do, that science and skilful nursing might add a few years to the mere existence of the little martyr, you will understand that his father came to that pass which you, Bliven, have illustrated in citing the case of the pharmacist. He was, in short, ready to try anything; to turn to quacks, necromancers, to Satan himself, if his son might be made whole!

NEXT MONTH

Don't miss this group of fine stories scheduled to appear in the January issue of WEIRD TALES on sale December 1.

The Lost Lady

by Seabury Quinn

A beautiful white dancer in the temple of Angkor was persecuted by the fiendish Doctor Sun Ah Poy.

The Horror from the Hills

by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.

A vivid and powerful story of shuddery horror, a gooseflesh tale about a stone idol brought from China.

The Master Has a Narrow Escape

by H. Warner Munn

A tale of the werewolf clan, The Thirty Years' War, and the first case of witchcraft in New England.

The Necromantic Tale

by Clark Ashton Smith

An occult story of much power, in which Sir Roderick Hagdon's life is tied to the personality of an infamous, long-dead ancestor.

Passing of a God

by Henry S. Whitehead

A weird story of surgery and the dark rites of the Black people in the land of Haiti.

The Galley-Slave

by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner

An unusual story of a man who retained a vivid memory of the voyage of Odysseus.

The Avenging Shadow

by Arlton Eadie

Practising forbidden arts in mediaeval Naples, Taso Vitelli sought to outwit the Prince of Darkness, forgetting that "He who supe with the Devil must have a long spoon."

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the January issue of WEIRD TALES

January Issue on Sale December 1

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"Oh, naturally he had sought the aid of religion. Noted clergy of his own faith had anointed the brave eyes, the patient lips, the crooked limbs, and prayed that God might work a miracle. But none was vouchsafed. I haven't the least idea who it was that suggested the Luciferians to Sir William."

"Luciferians? Devil-worshippers?" interrupted Holmes. "Were there any of them in your time?"

"There are plenty of them today; but it is the most secret sect in the world. Huysmans in *La-Bas* has told us as much as has any one; and you know perfectly well, or should, that all priests who believe in the Real Presence, take the utmost care that the sacred wafer does not pass into irresponsible hands. Many will not even place it on the communicant's palm; but only in his mouth. For the stolen Host is essential to the celebration of the infamous Black Mass which forms the chief ceremony of the Luciferian ritual. And every year a number of thefts, or attempted thefts, from the tabernaculum, are reported in the press.

"Now the theory of this strange sect is not without a certain distorted rationality. They argue that Lucifer, Star of the Morning, was cast out of Heaven after a great battle, in which he was defeated, to be sure, but not destroyed, nor even crippled. Today, after centuries of missionary zeal, Christianity has gathered only a tithe of the people into its fold; the great majority is, and always has been, outside. The wicked flourish, often the righteous stumble; and at the last great battle of Armageddon, the Luciferians believe that their champion will finally triumph.

"Meanwhile, and in almost impenetrable secrecy, they practise their infamous rites and serve the devil, foregathering preferably in some abandoned church, which has an altar, and above it a crucifix, which they reverse. It is believed that they number hundreds of thousands, and flourish in every quarter of the world; and it is presumed that they employ grips and passwords. But amid so much that is conjecture, this fact stands clear: the cult of Lucifer does exist, and has from time immemorial.

"I never had the least idea who suggested them to Sir William. May have been some friend who was a secret devotee, and wished to make a proselyte. May have been an idle word overheard in a club—or a penny bus. The point is, he did hear, discovered that an occult power was claimed by their unholy priests, was ready to mortgage his estate or sell his soul for his little chap, and somehow got in touch with them.

"The fact that he managed it, that he browbeat Watts-Bedloe into permitting one of the fraternity to enter the hospital at all, is the best example I can give of his despairing persistence. At that, the physician agreed only upon certain seemingly prohibitive conditions. The fellow was not to touch the little patient, nor even to draw near his bed. He was not to speak to him, or seek to hold his gaze. No phony hypnotism, or anything like that.

"Watts-Bedloe, I think, framed the conditions in the confident hope that they would end negotiations; and he was profoundly disgusted when he learned that the Luciferian, though apathetic, was not in the least deterred by the hardness of the terms. It appeared that he had not been at all willing to come under any circumstances; that he tried persistently to learn how Sir William had heard of him, and his address, and that he had refused remuneration of any sort. Altogether, a new breed of faker, you see!

"There were five of us in the room at

the time appointed, besides the little patient, who was sleeping peacefully. Fact is, Watts-Bedloe had taken the precaution of administering a sleeping-draft, in order that the quack might not in any possible way work upon his nervous system. Watts-Bedloe was standing by the cot, his sandy hair rumpled, his stiff mustache bristling, for all the world like an Airedale terrier on guard. The father was there, of course; and the head nurse, and a powerful and taciturn orderly. You can see that there wasn't much chance of the devil-man pulling off anything untoward!

"When, precisely on the moment, the door opened and he stood before us, I suffered as great a shock of surprize as ever in my life; and a rapid glance at my companions' faces showed me that their amazement equaled mine. I don't know just what type we had visualized—whether a white-bearded mystic clad in a long cloak with a peaked hat bearing cabalistic symbols, or a pale, sinister and debonair man of the world, such as George Arliss has given us, or what not; but certainly not the utterly insignificant creature who bowed awkwardly, and stood twirling a bowler hat in his hands as the door closed behind him.

"He was a little, plump, bald man of middle age, looking for all the world like an unsuccessful green-grocer, or a dealer in butter and cheese in a small way. Although the day was cool, with a damp yellow fog swirling over the city, he perspired freely, and continually wiped his brow with a cheap bandanna. He seemed at once ill at ease, yet perfectly confident, if you know what I mean. I realize that it sounds like silly rot; but that is the only way I can describe him. Utterly certain that he could do that for which he had come, but very much wish-

(Continued on page 853)

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(Continued from page 726)

views down to the Wild West thrillers, are hide-bound and hog-tied with traditions of unutterable dullness."

W. Billy Barbé, of San Antonio, Texas, writes to the Eyrie: "WEIRD TALES is now reaching an amazing stage, from the standpoint of present-day American fictitious literature. Magazines that depend almost entirely upon a universal appeal to the imaginative and more or less secreted side of the human race generally falter in their stride a bit, sooner or later; yet WEIRD TALES seems to be increasing rather than decreasing in popularity. I have perused WEIRD TALES for over seven years, and although I am of a very restless and impatient disposition, I have never tired of the periodical. There is a very good reason for this: WEIRD TALES, unlike so many other magazines, has not altered the original type of the contents that it first started out with, but is even now publishing stories of the weird, bizarre and unusual order; while many other magazines, not so successful today, have, for commercial reasons, filled their pages with either lewd, risqué and racy sex-appeal stories, or with the soft, dove-eyed love stories of grandmother's day, thinking thus to increase the circulation. I wonder if it would not be possible for you to publish as a reprint A. Merrit's story, *The Woman of the Wood*. That is the most beautiful and yet the most fascinating story that has even been published in WEIRD TALES. Even now, although I lost my copy of the magazine that contained the story some time ago, I can close my eyes and become enraptured by the mere thought of its dramatic beauty. Should you see fit to comply with my request, you will do a huge army of my friends, as well as myself, an enormous and generous favor."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? *The Druid's Shadow*, by Seabury Quinn, was your favorite in the October issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie; with Edmond Hamilton's story, *The Mind-master*, in second place.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE DECEMBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

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Reader's name and address:

(Continued from page 851)

ing that he were anywhere else. I heard Watts-Bedloe mutter *'my word!'* And I believe he would have spat disgustedly—were such an act thinkable of a physician in a London hospital!

"THE Luciferian priest turned to Sir William. When he spoke, it seemed entirely in keeping with his appearance that he should take liberties with his aspirates. 'I'm 'ere, m'lord. And h'at your service.'

"Watts-Bedloe spoke sharply. 'Look here, my man!' he said. 'Do you pretend to say that you can make this crippled child whole?'

"The strange man turned his moist, pasty face, livid in the fog murk, toward the specialist. ' 'E that I serves can, and will. I'm a middleman, in a manner of speaking. A transmitter. Hit's easy enough for 'im, but I don't advise it, and I warns you I'm not to be 'eld responsible for 'ow 'E does it.'

"Watts-Bedloe turned to Sir William. 'Let's have an end to the sickening farce,' he said curtly. 'I need fresh air!'

"Sir William nodded to the little man, who mopped his brow with his bandanna, and pointed to the cot. 'Draw back the coverlet!' he commanded.

"The nurse obeyed, after a questioning glance at Watts-Bedloe. 'Tyke off 'is nightgown,' continued the visitor.

"Watts-Bedloe's lips parted in a snarl at this, but Sir William arrested him with a gesture, stepped to his son's side, and with infinite gentleness took off the tiny gown, leaving the sleeping child naked in his bed.

"Again, as always, I felt a surge of pity sweep through me. The noble head, the pigeon breast, rising and falling softly now, the crooked spine, the little, gnarled, twisted limbs! But my atten-

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tion was quickly drawn back to the strange man.

"Barely glancing at the child, he fumbled at his greasy waistcoat, Watts-Bedloe watching him meanwhile like a lynx, as he took out a crumb of chalk and, squatting down, drew a rude circle on the floor about him; a circle of possibly four feet in diameter. And within this circle he began laboriously to write certain words and figures."

"Hold on there!" spoke Bliven. "Certain words and figures? Just what symbols, please?"

"There was a swastika emblem," Royce promptly replied, "and others familiar to some of the older secret orders, and sometimes found on Aztec ruins and Babylonian brick tablets; the open eye, for instance, and a rude fist with thumb extended. Also he scrawled the sequence 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9—the '8' omitted, you notice—which he multiplied by 18, and again by 27, and by 36; you can amuse yourselves working it out. The result is curious. Lastly, he wrote the sentence: '*Signa te, signa, temere me tangis et angis.*' A palindrome, you observe; that is, it reads equally well, or ill—backward or forward."

"Hocus pocus! Old stuff!" snorted Bliven.

Royce gazed mildly at him.

"Old stuff, as you say, professor. Older than recorded history. Having done this, a matter of five minutes, perhaps, with Watts-Bedloe becoming more and more restless, and evidently holding himself in with difficulty, the fellow rose stiffly from his squatting position, carefully replaced the fragment of chalk in his pocket, mopped his brow for the twentieth time, and gestured toward the cot with a moist palm. 'Now cover 'im hup!' he ordered. 'All hup; 'ead and all.'

"The nurse gently drew the sheet over the little form. We could see it rise and fall with the regular respiration of slumber. Suddenly, eyes wide open *and staring at the floor,* the fellow began to pray, in Latin. And whatever his English, his Latin was beautiful to listen to, and virgin pure! It was too voluble for me to follow verbatim—I made as good a transcript as I could a bit later, and will be glad to show it to you, Bliven—but, anyhow, it was a prayer to Lucifer, at once an adoration and a petition, that he would vouchsafe before these Christian unbelievers a proof of his dominion over fire, earth, air and water. He ceased abruptly as he had begun, and nodded toward the cot. 'Hit is done!' he sighed, and once again mopped his forehead.

"'You infernal charlatan!' snarled Watts-Bedloe, unable longer to contain himself. 'You've got the effrontery to stand there and tell us anything has been wrought upon that child by your slobbering drivel?'

"The man looked at him with lusterless eyes. 'Look for yerself, guv-ner,' he answered.

"It was Sir William who snatched back the sheet from his son; and till my dying day I shall remember the unearthly beauty of what our astounded eyes beheld. Lying there, smile upon his lips, like a perfect form fresh from the hand of his Creator, his little limbs straight and delicately rounded, a picture of almost awesome loveliness, lay the child we had but five minutes before seen as a wrecked and broken travesty of humanity."

Again Bliven interrupted explosively:

"Oh, I say now, Royce! I'll admit you tell a ripping story, as such; you had even me hanging breathless on your climax, but this is too much! As man to man,

you can't sit there and tell us this child was cured!"

"I didn't say that; for he was dead."

Bliven was speechless, for once; but Holmes spoke up in remonstrance:

"It seems strange to me that such a queer story should not have been repeated, and discussed!"

"It isn't strange, if you happen to know anything about London hospitals," Royce explained patiently. "Who would repeat it? Would Watts-Bedloe permit it to be known that by his permission some charlatan was admitted, and that during his devilish incantations his patient died? Would the stricken father mention the subject, even to us? Or the head nurse and orderly, cogs in an inexorable machine?

"All this took place nearly forty years ago; and it is the first time I have spoken of it. Watts-Bedloe died years back and Sir William's line is extinct. I can't verify a detail; but it all happened exactly as I have stated. As for the Luciferian, none of us, I think, saw him depart. He simply stole out in the slimy yellow fog, back to whatever private hell it was he came from, somewhere in London, the city nobody knows, and where anything may happen."

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Burnt Things

(Continued from page 752)

an unjust discharge. No proof could be offered, however.

Yesterday his charred body was found in the ruins of the factory, identification being possible by means of an old-fashioned watch he always carried. It is surprizing the body has not been discovered sooner, for it lay in plain sight, near the warehouse wall.

The mystery is heightened by the fact that several reputable people claim to have seen Barry prowling among the ruins of Como as recently as last Sunday. That this is impossible is evidenced by the watch, the hands of which stopped at two-fifteen. This is the approximate time the factory's night-shift discovered they were trapped by the flames.

The Wolf of St. Bonnot

(Continued from page 746)

light. There is indubitably proof of true materializations being made at séances. The British Society for Psychical Research and the *Société d'Etudes Psychiques*—both reliable associations of scientific men—have attested it. Very well, what makes such materializations possible?

"A spiritual being, whether it be the ghost of one once human or otherwise, possesses passions, but neither body nor parts to make them effective. Some 'ghosts' may show themselves, others may not, and it is these latter which visit séances in hope of materialization. Of themselves they can not materialize any more than the most skilled bricklayer can construct a house, but give the artizan materials with which to build, and *pouf!* the house is reared before you know it. So with these spirits. A form of energy is radiated by the sitters at the séance, something definite as radio waves, yet not to be seen or touched or handled. This is called psychoplasm. If enough of it be present, the hovering ghost, spirit or demon can so change its vibrations, so compress it, as to render it solid and ponderable. In fine, he has built himself a body.

"In normal circumstances the psychoplasm returns to the bodies which gave it off, when once its work is done. *Ha,* but suppose the spiritual visitant is a larcener—one who so greatly desires once more to live and move and have his being in this world that he will not return that which furnishes him a corporeal body? What then?

"There lies the danger of the séance, my friend. It may unwittingly give bodily structure to a discarnate, evil entity. So it was in this case. Yes."

"Yes?" I answered. "Well, where's the solution of the problem you said you'd found?"

"Here, *pardieu!* I shall reassemble the sitters at that séance and make that thief, Gilles Garnier, give back what he stole from them. Yes, I shall most assuredly do that, and this very night."

ALL afternoon he was busy at the telephone, tracing down the ten members who composed the circle at Twelvetrees with Norval Fleetwood and his wife. When all had been reached and agreed to gather at Fleetwood's town house that night, he rose wearily. "Do not wait dinner for me, my friend," he told me sadly. "Rather would I lose a finger

than forego the little young pig the so talented Nora McGinnis roasts in the kitchen for dinner, but something more precious than roast young pigs is involved here. I shall dine at an hotel in New York, *hélas*."

"Why, where are you going?"

"To a booking agency of the theater."

"A theatrical booking——"

"Precisely, exactly, quite so. I have said it. Meet me at Monsieur Fleetwood's at ten tonight, if you please, and as you value my friendship, see to it that no one of the party leaves before I come. *Au plaisir de vous revoir*."

HALF-PAST nine was sounding on the clock in Fleetwood's drawing-room when de Grandin arrived. Embarrassed and ill at ease, the sitters in the séance at Twelvetrees were grouped about the room, Norval doing his best to entertain them. Hildegarde, looking pale and haggard, but showing no serious physical results of her night's adventure, sat before the fire, and every now and then she shuddered slightly, though the room was warmed somewhat past the point of comfort. A frightened, half-expectant look was on her face, and once or twice as motor horns hooted mournfully in the street outside quick fear leaped into her eyes and she half rose from her seat with blenched cheeks and twitching, terrified lips.

With de Grandin came a tall, pale-faced young man in poorly fitting evening clothes, a virtuoso's mop of long, dark hair and deep-set, melancholy eyes. "Professor Morine, Doctor Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced the stranger. "Monsieur Fleetwood, Professor Morine."

"The professor is by profession a stage hypnotist," he explained in a lower tone. "At present he is without an engagement,

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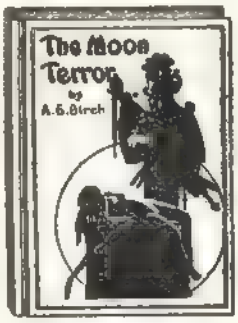

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but the gentlemen at the theatrical *bureau d'enregistrement* recommend his talents without reserve. His fee for tonight will be one hundred dollars. You agree, *Monsieur?*" he looked inquiringly at Fleetwood.

"If it will help cure Hildegarde it's cheap at twice the price."

"Very good, let us then say one hundred and fifty. Remember, the professor can secure no advertisement from tonight. Moreover, he has promised to forget all which transpires within this house."

"All right, all right," Fleetwood answered petulantly; "let's get started."

"*Très bien.* All is prepared in the farther room? Good. If you will kindly make excuse to have Madame Hildegarde leave the room a moment?"

Norval whispered something in his wife's ear, and as they left the apartment together de Grandin addressed the company:

"*Messieurs, Mesdames,* we are assembled here tonight in an endeavor to duplicate the conditions obtaining when Madame Fleetwood became first indisposed. Upon my honor I assure you no advantage will be taken, but it is necessary that you all submit to a state of light hypnosis. I shall stand by and personally see that all goes well. Do you agree?"

One after another the guests reluctantly acquiesced in the proposal until Mazie Noyer was reached. "I won't," she answered shortly. "I'll not be a party to any such ridiculous proceeding. You just want to get me in that man's power to make me a laughing-stock. I know! No, indeed, I'll not consent!"

"*Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin protested, "do you not care to see Madame Fleetwood restored to health? You assume a great burden by refusing."

"I don't care whether Hildegarde recovers or not. She can die before I'll consent to being hypnotized. You just want to make a fool of me!"

"*Parbleu,* nature has forestalled us in that!" he muttered, but aloud he answered: "Very well, *Mademoiselle,* as you wish. You will excuse us while we perform our work?" With a frigid bow he turned from her and motioned the others into an adjoining room.

All furniture had been removed from this apartment save a single round table and a dozen chairs. About the latter de Grandin traced a pentagram composed of two interlaced triangles, and in each of the five points he set a tall wax candle, a tiny, sharp-pointed dagger with tip pointing outward, and a small crucifix.

Norval led in Hildegarde, and as the sitters took their places round the table Professor Morine walked slowly round the circle, stroking each forehead and whispering soothingly. "All right, Doctor," he called softly as he completed the circuit. "What next?"

The Frenchman lighted the candles one by one, murmuring some sort of prayer or incantation as each took flame, surveyed the dimly lit room for a moment, then turned to the professor. "Bid them take orders from me, if you please," he answered.

While Professor Morine repeated the command, de Grandin drew forth five shallow silver dishes from beneath the table, poured some thick, dark fluid into each from a prodigious hip-flask; then from another flask he added some further liquor, dark like the first, but thinner and less viscid. As he recorked the second flask I became aware of the pleasant, heady odor of port wine.

Each of the five dishes he placed just outside one of the five points of the pentagram; then drawing something which jangled musically from beneath the table, he handed Morine and me each a small ecclesiastical censer and set the

powdered incense glowing. "Keep them in motion, my friends," he ordered, "and should anything appear amid the darkness, swing your censers toward it without ceasing."

To the sitters round the table he ordered: "You will now concentrate with all your force on recovering that which is yours. No thought will you give to anything else, nor will you see or notice what may take place here, but ceaselessly you will say—*and feel*—'Gilles Garnier, give me back that which you withhold!' Begin!"

Like the muttering of a summer storm-wind heard miles away, the low, monotonous, whispered chorus began: "Gilles Garnier, give me back that which you withhold—Gilles Garnier, give me back that which you withhold!"

FOR upward of five minutes the murmured, monotonous chorus went on. The ceaseless repetition made me drowsy. I stared about the dim, candle-lit room in an effort to distract my attention from the unceasing monody, wondering when it would stop.

"Why did you bring in this professional hypnotist?" I whispered to de Grandin. "I've seen you do some wonderful work of that kind; do you think it advisable to bring in a stranger?"

"Tiens," he returned softly, "there were twelve of them to be subjected, counting the recalcitrant Mademoiselle Noyer. To put them all beneath the spell would have tired me greatly, and *le bon Dieu* knows I must be fresh and mentally alert this night. *Attendez;* it comes!"

A sensation of intense cold was spreading through the warm, closed room, and the five candles flickered and bent their flames as though a breeze blew on them, though the light silk-mesh curtains at the windows were still as though cast in metal. From one of the vessels by a star-

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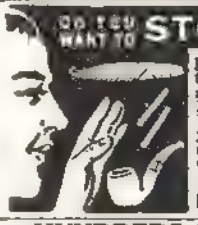
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point there came a strange, soft sound, such a sound as a cat makes when it laps milk, and the rubescent liquid in the dish showed faint ripples, as though disturbed by a dabbling finger—or an invisible tongue. Lower, lower sank the liquid; the bowl was now all but empty.

Softly, swiftly, de Grandin moved, snatching one after another of the silver vessels, dragging them within the outline of the pentagram.

Again we waited, the monotonous, refrain, "Gilles Garnier, give me back what you withhold!" dinning in our ears; then in a farther corner of the room showed a faint and ghastly phosphorescence. Brighter and brighter it glowed, took shape, took substance — a monstrous, shaggy white wolf crouched in the angle of the wall!

The beast was bigger than a mastiff, bigger than an Irish wolfhound, almost as big as a half-grown heifer, and from its wide and gaping mouth there lolled a gluttonous red tongue from which a drop of dark-red liquid dripped. But dreadful as the monster's size and aspect were, its eyes were more so. Incongruous as living orbs glaring through the eye-holes of a skull, they were, fierce, fiery malevolent and *human;* but human only to be vicious, cunning and wicked, as human intellect, perverted, is crueler than the instincts of the cruelest of brute beasts.

For a moment the monster glared at us; then with a bellowing cry of rage it rose upon its haunches, got to all four feet, and charged full-tilt upon us.

"Accursed of heaven, cast-off of hell, give back that which you withhold!" de Grandin cried, advancing to an angle of the pentagram to meet the werewolf's charge, swinging his censer toward it, so that clouds of incense floated forward, and returning the wolf-thing's glare with a stare of equal hatred and ferocity.

Where the narrow chalk-line of the pentagram traced across the floor the great beast stopped abruptly as though in contact with a solid wall, gave a bay of wild, insensate rage, and recoiled, choking and gasping from the cloud of incense.

"Accursed of heaven, give back that which you withhold!" de Grandin ordered yet again.

The great white beast eyed him questioningly, lowered itself till its bellyhairs scarcely cleared the floor, and slowly circled round the pentagram, whining half fearfully, half savagely.

"Accursed of heaven, give back that which you withhold!" came the inexorable command once more.

Oddly, the wolf-thing seemed losing substance. Its solidarity seemed dwindling; where a moment before it had been substantial as any terror of the forest, we could now plainly discern the outlines of the room through its body, as though it were composed of vapor. It lost its red and white tones and became luminous, like a figure traced in phosphorescent paint on a dark background. The head, the trunk, the limbs and tail became elongated, split off from one another, rose slowly toward the ceiling like little globes of luminosity, floated in midair a moment, then slowly settled toward the monotonously droning sitters round the table.

As each luminous globe touched a sitter's head it vanished, not like a bursting bubble, but slowly, like a ponderable substance being sucked in, as milk in a goblet vanishes when imbibed through a straw.

A single tiny pear-shaped globule of light remained, bobbing aimlessly against the ceiling, bouncing down again, as an imprisoned wasp may make the circuit of a room into which it has inadvertently flown.

"Accursed of heaven, give back that

which you withhold!" de Grandin ordered, staring fixedly at the rebounding fire-ball, "give back that which——"

"Here, I've stood about enough of this —I want to know what's going on here!" Mazie Noyer burst into the room. "If you're doing anything mystic, I want to——"

"Pour l'amour de Dieu, have a care!" de Grandin's appalled shout cut her short. She had walked across an angle of the pentagram, oversetting and extinguishing one of the candles as she did so.

"I won't be bullied and insulted by you any longer, you miserable little French snip!" she announced striding toward him. "I'll——"

The fire-ball fell to the floor as though suddenly transmuted to lead. We could hear the impact as it struck the boards. For a moment it rolled aimlessly to and fro, seemed to shrink—compress itself—and quickly took on the shape of a tiny, white wolf.

Scarcely larger than a mouse it was, but a perfect replica of the great beast which had menaced us a few moments earlier, even to its implacable savagery. With a howl which was hardly more than a rat-squeak in volume, yet fierce and terrifying for all that, it dashed across the room, straight at the angle of the pentagram where the candle had been overturned.

"Pardieu, we meet on something like even ground, *Monsieur le Loup-garou,* I think!" de Grandin cried, seized one of the small, sharp-pointed daggers from the floor and impaled the advancing miniature monster with its keen blade.

The tiny, savage thing died slowly, writhing horribly. With teeth and claws it fought against the steel which pinned it to the floor, blood and futile, hissing, agonized squealing howls issuing from its gaping mouth. At last its struggles ceased, it quivered and lay still.

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you killed that poor little animal as heartlessly as——" Miss Noyer raged at him, then broke off her tirade abruptly and planted a resounding slap upon de Grandin's cheek.

A red and angry patch showed on his face where her palm and fingers struck, but the rest of his countenance went livid beneath the insult. *"Sorcière!* Witch-woman; ally of hell's dark powers!" he cried furiously. "Were it not that I must burn him to ashes in the fire, I would give you the carcass of your familiar for a keepsake. Be off, get gone, ere I forget your sex and——" He strode toward her, eyes blazing with such cold, concentrated fury that she recoiled from him as from a serpent. "You dare!" she challenged in a shrill, frightened voice. "You just dare strike me!" then turned and raced through the door as though in fear of swift and condign punishment.

"OF COURSE," de Grandin told me in my study some two hours later, "we could neglect no precautions, my friend. The pentagram has at all times and in all ages been esteemed as a guard against the powers of evil; wicked spirits,

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Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1930.

State of Illinois
County of Cook ss.

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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My commission expires May 4, 1934.

even the most powerful, are balked by it. In addition, I placed in each of its five angles a blessèd candle from the church, a crucifix and also a dagger which had been dipped in *eau bénite.* Evil spirits of an elemental nature—those which have never been housed in human flesh—can not face pointed steel, probably because it concentrates radiations of psychic force from the human body which are destructive to them. In addition, I secured from the good *curé* who let me have the candles three censers filled with consecrated incense. *Mordieu,* he was hard to convince, that one, but once I had convinced him that the blessèd articles were needed to combat a dread invader from the other world, he went the entire pig, as you Americans say. Yes. Incense, you must know, is highly objectionable to wicked spirits, whether they be the ghosts of long-dead evil men or ill-disposed neutrarians bent on doing mischief to mankind, whom they hate.

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"What was in those silver dishes?" I asked.

"Bait," he answered with a grin. "Blood and wine, my friend; wine and

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blood. The mixture of those liquids is especially pleasing to the hosts of evil. In the celebration of *la messe noire*—the black mass where Satan is invoked—by example, the chalice is filled with mingled wine and blood from the cut throat of a sacrificed babe. Therefore, I procured some fresh blood from the hospital and some fresh wine from a legger-of-the-boot this morning, and set my bait. The werewolf came to drink, but I would not let him lap his fill. No. When he had drank one bowlful I did move the others from his reach within the angles of the pentagram, lest he become too powerful for us. One does not nourish one's enemy before the encounter, my friend. Assuredly not. All of which reminds me——"

"Of what?" I asked, as he paused with one of his well-remembered, elfish grins.

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